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## JOURNALISM REVIEW

When Death Ends the Story

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## CAMPAIGN DOES '88 TV DESERVE A MEDAL?





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**To assess the performance** of journalism in all its forms, to call attention to its shortcomings and strengths, and to help define or redefine - standards of honest, responsible service . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent 9

> Excerpt from the Review's founding editorial, Autumn 1961

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Publisher Joan Konner

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Columbia Journalism Review (ISSN 0010- 194X) is published bimonthly under the auspices of the faculty, alumni, and friends of the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University, Volume XXVII, Number 5, January/February 1989. Copyright © 1989 Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University, Subscription rates: one year 518; two years 532; three years 545. Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add 54 per year. Back issues: \$5. Please address all subscription mail to: Columbia Journalism Review, Subscription Service Dept., 200 Alton Place, Marion, Ohio 43302. Editorial office: 700 Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027; (212) 280-5595. Business office: 700A. Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027; (212) 280-5595. Business office: 700A. Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027; (2012) 280-5595. (212) 280-2716. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. No claims for back copies honored after one year. National newsstand distribution: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. Postmaster: send Form 3579 to Columbia Journalism Review, 200 Atton Place, Manion, Ohio 43302.

## CHRONICLE

#### **Inside stories**

Dannie Martin is in good company, in a way, although he is in a federal prison. Like St. Paul, Voltaire, Oscar Wilde, and Thomas Paine before him, he is writing while behind bars. But unlike those men he is also being published from prison.

Martin, who is forty-nine, is serving a thirty-three-year sentence for the attempted armed robberies of two banks. Over the past two and a half years, he has written more than twenty articles for the San Francisco Chronicle's "Sunday Punch" section that skillfully portray life in the federal penitentiary at Lompoc, California. They include scenes that no outside reporter could get. In one article, Martin talks about some squirrels he and other inmates adopted as pets in the yard at Lompoc. After a while, small metal boxes appeared between the inner and outer fences that surround the yard, and he watched the squirrels run in and out of them. Then the squirrels disappeared. Martin believed the boxes contained poison—the prison solution, he wrote, to the "squirrel problem." "The boxes are long gone now, and strange as it seems, not one convict or guard ever said a word about the squirrels or their fate.

But Martin's career as a free-lance jour-

nalist was jeopardized last June when he wrote a blunt piece about the new warden at Lompoc. It ran with an unsubtle headline, THE GULAG MENTALITY. Martin wrote that prison authorities had "set out to demolish the last vestiges of privacy" in the prison. "New wardens have different ways of doing things," he wrote. "It's a little like the way a new dog sprays around the yard to establish his territory."

Two days after the article appeared, Martin was placed in solitary confinement. Officials claimed they were just putting him in protective custody because they had heard his life was in danger from inmates upset by the article; at the same time, they said Martin was under investigation for "encouraging a group demonstration." After two days of solitary and a week back in his cell, he was transferred—minus his writing materials—to a federal holding facility in San Diego, and then to a federal prison in Phoenix.

The transfer, officials said, came because Martin had violated a federal regulation stating that inmates "may not receive compensation or anything of value for correspondence with the news media. The inmate may not act as a reporter or publish under a by-line."

That regulation was news to Martin and the Chronicle, and they went to court to challenge its constitutionality. They also asked to have Martin's transfer revoked on the grounds that it violated his right of freedom of the press. "Despite what people may think, a prisoner's constitutional rights are not checked at the prison gate," says Jeff A. Leon, Martin's pro bono attorney.

In July, a judge in San Francisco issued a temporary restraining order allowing Martin to resume his outside writing. Federal judge Charles Legge said the plaintiffs had made "a substantial showing that there has been retaliatory action taken against Mr. Martin for the exercise of his constitutional rights." The judge refused to interfere with the transfer, however, saying, "I don't think it's my function to tell the Bureau of Prisons where to put prisoners."

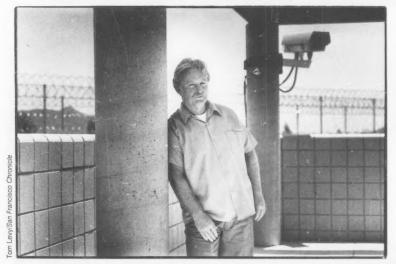
Martin, though still in Phoenix, resumed writing his column for the *Chronicle*. In one piece he discussed women who write to inmates as pen pals, and told of a woman who had corresponded with a man who she didn't know was a convicted rapist—until one of his letters described in graphic detail what it would be like to rape her.

Then, in November, Judge Legge suspended for all federal prisons the regulation against writing for pay. Legge said he wants to explore the issue more fully in a trial this year. In his ruling, the judge noted that Martin is not the only prison writer who has been published and paid for his work.

Others include Denny McLain, the former Detroit Tigers pitcher and two-time Cy Young Award winner who was convicted of racketeering. He wrote a sports-related column for Metropolitan Detroit, a now-defunct monthly magazine, from federal prison at Talladega, Alabama, and was paid for it. "My Life Inside," an article in the September issue of Esquire, was written by Bernard "Buzz" Farbar, an editor convicted of drug dealing. He is an inmate at a prison in Pennsylvania. Neither Farbar's agent nor his editors at Esquire would say whether he was paid for the piece. Bruce Perlowin, an inmate at a federal prison in Pleasanton, California, arranged to be paid through a third party for a recent article he wrote for California Magazine about his role in a marijuana-smuggling ring and how he was caught.

By the time of the November hearing, Judge Legge had had second thoughts about Martin's transfer. He said he would order him to be moved back to California, to a prison somewhere near the *Chronicle*, although not Lompoc, where he might be made to feel less than welcome.

Mighty pen: San Francisco Chronicle columnist and federal prisoner Dannie Martin





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So Martin, who seems to believe strongly in the value of his writing, for himself and his readers, can continue it for now. He says he sees himself as a reporter unofficially assigned to the prison beat. A former drug addict who has been in and out of prison since he was a teenager, Martin will be eligible for parole in three years, and he is counting on

his writing to help him make a life on the outside: "This writing is over me like an umbrella, protecting me for a better future," he says, "and no one is going to take that away from me."

Lion Calandra

Lion Calandra is an intern at the Review.

economic issues most other reporters didn't understand." But Energy User News says it had not been told of the extent of her prior battles with the utility, and that they created a conflict of interest. "Her stance affected the integrity of the newspaper," says the paper's attorney. Kirby Wilcox.

Soon after she was fired, Savage was hired as a stringer on energy issues by the New York-based Journal of Commerce. Savage contends the utility complained about her to her new editors, and that this time she was told to avoid stories on nuclear power, her area of expertise. Stanford Erickson, her editor at the Journal of Commerce, confirms that PG&E complained, but says that Savage had been told from the start that nuclear power was off limits because of her background and her troubles at Energy User News. "It was clear to us that there was an appearance of conflict of interest," he says.

Savage left the *Journal* after three months. Last March, she sued Pacific Gas & Electric, three of its top executives, and *Energy User News* for \$100 million, charging slander, conspiracy, breach of contract, and harassment. She lost the first round in October when a Superior Court judge in San Francisco threw out the slander charge, implying in his ruling that the utility's executives had the right to express the opinion that Savage is biased. Savage is appealing the slander ruling, and a trial on the other charges is expected later this year. Meanwhile, she is reporting for a computer magazine.

Nadine Joseph

Nadine Joseph is a free-lance writer and a Newsweek stringer in Oakland, California.



She sued:
Journalist
J.A. Savage says
complaints from
California's
PG&E about her
antinuclear
past have
short-circuited
her reporting
career.

#### Whose bias on the energy beat?

When J.A. Savage moved to Berkeley in 1985, she thought her previous experience would serve her well in her budding journalism career. For six years she had been a well-known antinuclear activist in California's Humboldt County and one of the founders of Redwood Alliance, a group that helped persuade state officials to begin cleaning up a controversial nuclear power plant in northern California. During that time, she says, she became an expert in complicated economic issues related to energy use, such as the cost and financing of power plants.

Her career as an energy reporter started in the fall of 1986, when she was hired as the West Coast correspondent for *Energy User News*, a small weekly published by Fairchild Publications in New York and written for businesses looking for answers on how to buy energy. The biggest utility on her beat, which encompassed several states, was northern California's Pacific Gas & Electric Company — owner of the nuclear plant that Redwood Alliance had gone after. A few months before she was hired, Savage had appeared before an administrative law judge of California's Public Utilities Commission to ask that Redwood Alliance be allowed to take part in

hearings on PG&E's Diablo Canyon plant, and the judge had ordered that she be paid for her testimony.

Savage contends that despite her background, her stories were accurate and objective. "My editors knew that I was a diehard environmentalist but also professional about not letting my bias show," shy says. Her former Energy User News editor wrote in a December 1987 memo to colleagues at The Journal of Commerce, where Savage also later worked, that she was "capable of writing copy that fairly presents views of the people she disagrees with."

About a year after Savage joined Energy User News, a PG&E executive complained about her to her editors in New York. The editors fired her six days later, a move that has thrown all three major players in the drama into a lawsuit and into an interesting debate about whether a reporter's background can create a conflict of interest.

Savage thinks the utility's objections to her past advocacy is just a smokescreen, that it perceives her as a threat because she was more knowledgeable than some other energy reporters. "I was fairly pushy, always getting past the p.r. guys," she says. "I tackled

## **Escalating in Escalon**

Some editors are a little thin-skinned, as Gladys Cohagan of Escalon, California, found out. Cohagan, the head of quality control for a local produce-packing plant, had been a reader of the *Escalon Times* for forty years when she came across an article that made her mad. The article was a badly garbled pre-election profile of a local candidate for San Joaquin County supervisor.

The candidate was Victoria Royster and the profile was full of typographical errors. Royster's first quote read this way: "We need a strong leader with a backgoround of community invovlement with the capability to assess what's going on, someone who willl sometimes say not otr yes even when it's not popular but because they believe it irrrs right.,"'d"

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Cohagan was working as a volunteer in Royster's campaign-Royster eventually lost-and didn't buy the editors' explanation that a faulty computer was to blame. She accused the Times, which endorsed Royster's opponent, of intentionally sabotaging the article. The paper's general manager, Williams Camp, editor Richard Myers, and former managing editor Tom Mauldin claim they told Cohagan they would reprint the correct version of the article in the paper's next issue, where it did indeed appear.

But by then Cohagan had already acted. She had written a letter to the editor and paid to have it run as an ad to insure that her complaints would be printed in their entirety. "You not only 'Screwed Up' the printing," she wrote, "you also did not print some important facts of the interview and then added a few choice words of your own here and there to alter the meaning of what [Royster] did say. You must feel all of your readers are a bunch of imbeciles not to figure out what is going on."

Escalon is usually pretty quiet, and proud of that fact. Surrounded by dairy farms and almond orchards, it is a neatly trimmed oasis for travelers who come over to the San Joaquin Valley from the Bay area. The Times, a sixty-two-year-old paper with a circulation



She got sued: Gladys Cohagan's words about her local paper came back to haunt her.

of 2,000, reflects the small town's priorities, running stories on Escalon High School's homecoming festivities above the fold on page one.

The bucolic setting has not proved soothing to Times editors' temperaments, however. After running Cohagan's ad, the paper turned around and sued her for libel and slander. It's a "rather unique situation," says Cohagan's attorney, Steven Clair, who serves as her spokesman.

Why did the Times print the ad in the first place? Publisher Stanley Cook and his editors will not comment, but their attorney, Roger Schrimp, claims that the editors felt it was their duty as men who put out a "public newspaper" to run the ad. Clair counters that the newspaper had no legal obligation to run

A San Joaquin County superior court judge agreed with Clair and threw the libel portion of the case out in September. In October, Schrimp added to the slander part, which claims Cohagan not only wrote nasty things about the Times, but threw verbal darts, too.

Things keep escalating in Escalon.

Fran Bott

Fran Bott is a reporter for the San Joaquin News Service.

#### Wenner's winners

Why is Rolling Stone magazine's list of THE 100 BEST SINGLES OF THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS like a bar of Ivory Soap? Because it's 99 and 44/100 percent pure, in the words of one of its defenders.

Actually, maybe only 97 percent pure, according to some of the music critics who helped put the list together. The magazine said the list, published in its September 8 issue, was "compiled from a survey of twenty-five Rolling Stone critics, which was supervised by the magazine's editors." It sounded pretty mathematical, if a bit male and pale. Twenty-three white men-including Rolling Stone editor and publisher Jann S. Wenner and music editor David Wildand two white women were asked to submit lists of the seventy-five best singles recorded since 1963. These lists, in turn, were tabulated and combined into one top 100. "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," by the Rolling Stones, was number one, and "People Get Ready," by The Impressions, brought up the

But some of the critics polled say they know of three songs in between that were not there by consensus: Foreigner's "I Want

To Know What Love Is" (No. 54); The Raspberries' "Overnight Sensation" (No. 90); and Billy Joel's "Uptown Girl" (No. 99). These critics told the New York Daily News that the Foreigner and Billy Joel songs were added personally by Jann Wenner and that Wenner maintains close friendships with the performers. And the song by the Raspberries (a group perhaps better known for its first hit single, "Go All The Way") was apparently the personal choice of David Wild. "It's one of his favorite songs," says one critic. "But no other critic I know would have voted for it."

No one has denied that the list was fiddled with. All queries to the magazine were referred to its publicity director, Stuart Zakim, and speaking of the Foreigner and Billy Joel songs, Zakim says, "If Jann felt these two songs belonged on the list then, as editor, he can say these songs belong on the list." The list was not presented as a poll, he adds, but as a survey of the critics: "Surveys are surveys, not polls."

Eileen AJ Connelly

Eileen AJ Connelly is an intern at the Re-



# Is your story the real crime here?



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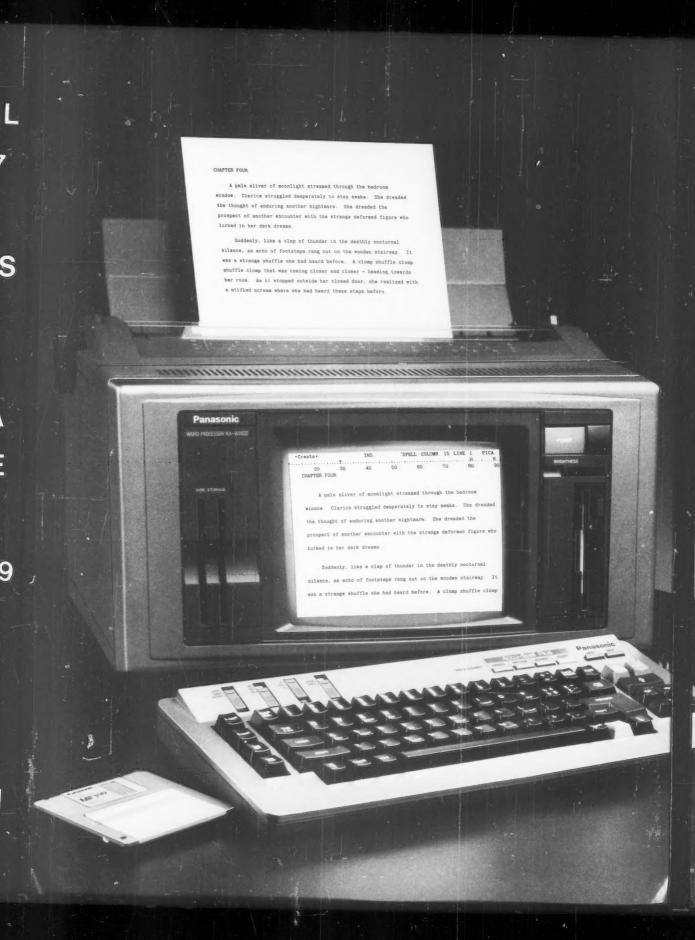
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#### P.R.'s odd man out

Reed Trencher used to run a public relations firm in San Francisco the old-fashioned way. He worked on retainer, pitching stories to reporters about his clients. Then, in 1980, he hired a news producer away from a local NBC affiliate. "Within one month," Trencher says, "it started to rain television exposure for our clients."

Soon after, Trencher let the five other members of his staff go and replaced them with former journalists from print and TV, people he calls ''media heavyweights.'' More important, he decided to change the way he charged clients: instead of paying a monthly retainer, they would pay—and pay big—only when a feature story about the client appeared in print or on television. Promotional material sent to Trencher's prospective clients defines a feature as ''your company's spokesperson, product, or service being the primary focus, distinctive highlight, conspicuous part, or recurring aspect of that media exposure.''

And the more significant the exposure, the more it would cost. According to a 1987 price list, Trencher was to get \$42,800 for placing a piece on 60 Minutes, \$21,135 for a story in People magazine, and \$11,875 for an article in The New York Times.

A handful of small public relations firms also charge success-only fees, but not on Trencher's scale. Lisa Lapides, a publicist in Franklin, Michigan, says her top fee for getting a story on national television is \$6,000. She says when Trencher heard about her prices, he told her, "Lisa, you're standing on the corner and giving it away." Trencher also has a \$10,000 start-up fee, which he says is refundable if he doesn't get results, and "mirror" fees (80 percent of the original fee) if the first story gets picked up elsewhere. Such fees can run up a \$100,000 bill in a hurry; but the fee-for-placement structure can

look attractive to a company paying another p.r. firm, say, a \$100,000 annual retainer fee with little to show for it.

Trencher claims his California firm, Primetime Publicity & Media Consulting Corporation, is very successful, and some clients have been quoted praising the return on their investment. But fee-for-placement may not always be as good a bargain as it sounds: other clients talk about disputes they've had with Trencher over gray areas. Rick Goldberg, president of Center Stage Inc., a recording company in Houston, says Trencher assured him, "If it's not a feature, you don't have to pay for it." But Goldberg says he was billed \$1,000 for a one-line mention in a July issue of The Wall Street Journal and \$14,089 for one paragraph in People. Trencher denies making that assurance, and the case is now in arbitration.

Primetime's press material notes that "clients want positive editorial coverage," and Trencher says that Primetime does not charge for "really bad" negative stories. Gene Montgomery, president of Sylvan Learning Corporation in Montgomery, Alabama, which franchises after-school learning centers, says he was charged for a piece on CBS Evening News that he says "could have been interpreted as negative; at least it wasn't real positive." Montgomery says he eventually dropped Primetime because he considered the firm "unprofessional."

Trencher claims his approach, which has gotten a media blitz of its own, is "changing the face of public relations," as one of his brochures puts it. Indeed, one top p.r. executive says privately that he suspects every major agency has at least considered using fee-for-placement billing. But some in the field reject the whole idea. "P.R. people don't like publicity to be sold by the pound," says Jack O'Dwyer, publisher of an industry

newsletter. "They feel it's immoral, illogical. It puts a price tag on media copy, which is not supposed to be for sale."

And some of Trencher's competitors object to the way Primetime pays its "associates"—the people who pitch stories on an unsalaried, independent-contractor basis. Associates get high commissions for placing stories, usually 20 to 25 percent of the client fee, according to Primetime's director of associate relations, Steve Greenwald. Josh Baran, the head of a p.r. firm in Los Angeles, says the whole approach could poison the relationship between publicist and reporter: "What if the reporter says, 'Oh, you're going to get five grand if I say "yes." 'Who knows? Maybe money could change hands."

That possibility does not seem to worry editors, however, at least not the editors asked about it in a quick survey of top newspapers. Primetime's approach, they say, shouldn't affect what ends up in print because stories are generally approved by editors—not just the reporters who suggest them—and because journalists usually have no way of knowing how a p.r. firm is billing its clients.

"Fee structure is not germane to us," says George Cotliar, managing editor of the Los Angeles Times, where Primetime got a story placed and billed its client, The Sharper Image, a retailer of high-tech gadgets and executive toys, for \$8,830. "That's none of our business," Cotliar adds. "Our business is reacting well to stories that come from p.r. or reacting negatively, depending on the value of the information." Cotliar, who had never heard of the fee-for-placement practice, does not think the high sums involved would tempt his reporters: "A person who can be bought can be bought for a bottle of wine as easily as anything else."

In fact, for better or worse, a reporter may not even know Primetime is on the phone. "When Primetime's people call," says Trencher, "these are known journalists and the name Primetime is probably not even mentioned." (Trencher will not identify the former journalists who work for him, he says, for fear editors who are wary of fee-for-placement p.r. will warn reporters to ignore their pitches.)

Someone who used to pitch stories for Primetime confirms that, when calling reporters, associates don't always identify themselves as working for Primetime: "It was kind of an unwritten rule that if they didn't ask, you didn't tell them. Half the time, nobody would ask who I was."

Deborah Quilter

Deborah Quilter is a free-lance writer in New York.



The pitch:
Reed Trencher
talks to a
reporter in
Phoenix. Is his
pay-for-play
scheme
"changing the
face of public
relations?"

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## Italy: when big business shapes the news

In Italy, tough business coverage is a rare commodity. This is hardly surprising in light of the fact that companies controlled by three powerful entrepreneurs control all but one of the national dailies. It is as if IBM owned The New York Times, GM The Wall Street Journal, and Exxon The Washington Post—only worse, since these entrepreneurs control companies whose stock accounts for half the value of all stocks traded on the Italian stock exchange.

Gianni Agnelli, chairman of automaker Fiat SpA, controls *La Stampa* of Turin and (indirectly) Milan's respected *Corriere della Sera*. Raul Gardini, the chairman of the Ferruzzi foodstuffs and chemicals group, controls *Il Messagero* of Rome and recently bought Italy's only "independent" daily, a business paper called *Italia Oggi*. Carlo De Benedetti, chairman of Ing. C. Olivetti & Co., is a big shareholder in *La Repubblica*, the country's largest paper, and has numerous interests in book and magazine publishing.

The one major national daily that is not controlled by one of these industrialists, a business paper called *Il Sole-24 Ore*, is owned by the national confederation of in-

dustry, roughly equivalent to the National Association of Manufacturers in the U.S.

The result is a press that may be extremely aggressive in rooting out government inefficiencies, especially if they make doing business more costly, but seems to wear blinders when reporting on Italian business.

This summer, for example, Deutsche Bank AG said that "in light of the European development" toward a single internal market, it considered its 2.5 percent shareholding in Fiat, worth nearly half a billion dollars, to be a "permanent" investment. In the local press, this was big news. One Agnelli-controlled publication even used the headline FIAT UEBER ALLES. Yet few of the articles mentioned prominently that Deutsche Bank had been stuck with these Fiat shares for nearly two years, unable to unload them. In the fall of 1986, the bank had been the lead underwriter in a disastrous international offering of a 15 percent stake in Fiat. The bank paid around 16,000 lire apiece for the shares. Since then, the stock has been stuck at around 10,000 lire. If the Germans did sell, they would lose at least \$250 million.

Accenting the positive in business report-

ing seems to be an Italian specialty. On July 30, for example, *Il Sole* published figures showing that Italian clothing exports to the U.S. were in decline. The story blamed the trend solely on the dollar, and stated flatly that "without a doubt American interest in Italian clothing is growing." This was backed up only by an interview with the head of the Italian clothing association. The head-line read: THE SUCCESSFUL AMERICAN ONLY WEARS ITALIAN STYLES.

Yet the problems in the U.S. of Italian clothes-maker Benetton SpA were documented by several international publications—including Business Week, Forbes, The Wall Street Journal, and the Financial Times—over a period of several months before Italian newspapers got onto them, although the story had a very strong local angle. Benetton owns no newspapers, but it is one of the fast-track companies that helped boost the image of Italian industry abroad in the early 1980s.

Agnelli, De Benedetti, and Gardini, meanwhile, often battle among themselves for power, and the conflicts are frequently reflected in their papers' business pages. A recent example was De Benedetti's bold takeover bid for Societé Générale de Belgique SA, in Brussels, a huge holding company that is said to control a third of

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The bosses: Gianni Agnelli, chairman of Fiat, and Carlo De Benedetti, chairman of Olivetti, put their stamp on Italy's news.

Belgium's economic activity. The bid, which was eventually unsuccessful, was heralded on *La Repubblica*'s front page as the lead story under the exaggerated headline DE BENEDETTI BUYS A THIRD OF BELGIUM. At archival Agnelli's *La Stampa* the story was relegated to an inside business page until later, when it looked as if De Benedetti's bid would fail.

Italian journalists can be their own worst enemies. It's not so much that newspaper owners actually dictate what they write, but "whenever you write about something that may concern your publisher, you question yourself about the best way to present the story so as not to offend him and still maintain an air of objectivity," says Emilio Galli Zugaro, economics correspondent for the Agnelli-controlled business weekly Il Mondo. "I feel the warm breath of my publisher on my neck. So I avoid trouble by writing about things like international interest rates."

Some contend that industrial ownership of the press also can lead to slanted coverage of policy issues. Earlier this year Paolo Cirino Pomicino, a member of parliament, objected to the privatization of a state-run merchant bank, Mediobanca, a large part of which was being sold to a group led by Agnelli, Gardini, and De Benedetti. Pomicino, who was roundly criticized by the national press, says he was unable to get any of the major papers to print an article explaining his position. Il Mattino of Naples, a paper controlled by Pomicino's own Christian Democratic party, eventually printed the piece.

Where can Italians look for unbiased business coverage? There are some regional papers, but these depend heavily on wire services for national, international, and business news. One of the top wire services is owned

by ENI, the state oil company; another by De Benedetti's Olivetti; a third by the Socialist party. A couple of dailies, including the Communist party's *Il Manifesto*, are owned by cooperatives of journalists. But these papers usually have small staffs and fewer resources than the national dailies.

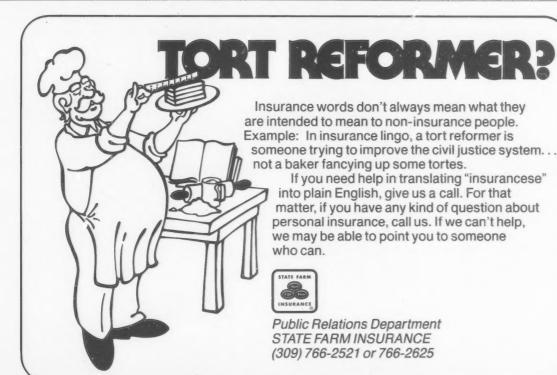
Television, the main source of news for most Italians, has its own biases. Italian law discourages news broadcasts by privately owned stations, and each of the three state-owned stations is heavily influenced by a political party: RAI Uno by the dominant Christian Democrats; RAI Due by the Socialists; RAI Tre by the opposition Communist party. On a typical news night, these stations may give more play to an arcane declaration by a party leader than to news of international importance.

Only one private station, Tele Monte Carlo—which broadcasts from the principality of Monaco and thus avoids the newsbroadcasting restrictions—provides impartial, American-style TV news. But whether TMC, owned by Brazil's Rede Globo, will remain independent is in question. The Agnellis of Fiat have an option to buy 50 percent of it.

\*\*Laura Colby\*\*

Laura Colby

Laura Colby is Rome correspondent for The Wall Street Journal/Europe.



## ON THE JOB

## Surviving in Wyoming

experience." My break came in August

of 1985, after I had sent out résumé tapes

all over the country. The call was on my

answering machine. Mike Morgan,

news director at KOTA-TV in Rapid

City, South Dakota, said he wanted to

hire me. I had applied for a reporter/ anchor spot; Morgan wanted me to take

over as the station's Wyoming bureau

correspondent. I had always said I was

willing to pay my dues, to take whatever

offer came first, but a one-man bureau,

250 miles from the home station and way

out in the wilds of Wyoming? I had to

Three years earlier, when I was a

sophomore in college, I had made up my

mind to go after a TV reporting career.

I worked for the college newspaper, re-

ported and edited for the college radio

seriously think about it.

spiring television reporters hear it

all the time: "Start in a small

. market where you'll get lots of

school's weekly news show, and served as an intern at WRC-TV in Washington, D.C. — and all this had gotten me was a job as a deejay at a Washington commercial radio station and now this, an "in" as a one-man band in the middle

of nowhere.

This was the deal: I would work alone
—photographer, soundman, editor, producer, reporter, I would do it all. My salary would be \$180 a week. I would have to use my own car for news coverage, for which I would be paid \$24 a week plus whatever I spent on gas. I would be responsible for at least one package a day, six days a week, plus VO/SOTs, sports, and commercial shoots. I didn't really understand the jargon or what I was getting into, and I am sure it was better that way.

A strong wind was blowing when I pulled up to a motel in Sheridan, Wyoming. The sign said "Jesus loves you, Clean Rooms." There were actually tumbleweeds rolling along.

Sheridan is a city of about 15,000 people, with a movie theater, some cowboy bars, and a Holiday Inn. Things are different in Wyoming. Phone numbers, for instance, have only five digits. Eventually I figured out the phone system and

by ED SANCTIS

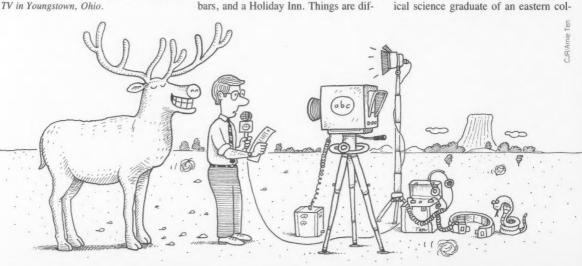
managed to get a call through to the station where I would work. I got directions, put on my best suit, and set out to find my new workplace. I was looking for a TV station and that was a mistake.

KSGW-TV is a satellite station connected to KOTA-TV in Rapid City by a microwave link. The station's offices are in a one-story structure made of sheet metal, shared with a noisy welding shop. I drove past the building four times before I noticed the ABC decal on the door. I met my future co-workers - Andy the salesman and Bud the engineer. They showed me to the "studio." The reporter I came to replace - Josh - was bent over the editing machines. I noticed a bottle of white-out. He explained that he was painting the backs of the small black bugs that were crawling all over the place in an attempt to track their mi-

Josh was not what I had expected. I had expected a hick and he was a political science graduate of an eastern col-

station, held the executive-producer and anchor positions at the journalism

Ed Sanctis is currently a reporter at WFMJ-



## Once more, through the looking glass

Suppose an American company—one that operates all over the world—wants to open a new factory, store, warehouse, or office building in the United States. Such a facility, of course, would create new jobs for Americans, along with all the other good things that happen when people are put to work.

But when the company's top executives take a final look at the economics, they hesitate. So a foreign company steps in, the project gets built, and everybody lives happily ever after—except the American company, and maybe some American workers, who find themselves penalized by American tax law, and thereby beaten out by a foreign competitor.

The above-mentioned script seems highly illogical, like something out of Alice in Wonderland, if not Franz Kafka. But it's eminently possible, and even probable, thanks to the vagaries of the 1986 tax law passed in the name of reform.

The culprit in our example is the section of the rewritten tax law dealing with the allocation of interest expense.

What those words mean is that for a U.S. multinational company, with affiliates operating in many parts of the world, the interest paid on money borrowed to finance a U.S. business is treated as if it were paid in part to finance foreign operations. And this, of course, results in a partial loss of the tax deduction. Foreign companies have no such requirement. That's the technical definition. As a practical matter, the words mean that it's often cheaper for a foreign company to create American jobs than for a U.S. company to do so. And the foreign companies, because their after-tax interest costs are lower, are more competitive in the U.S. than many U.S. companies.

Here's why:

An American affiliate of the U.S. multinational, Global Widgets, Inc., wants to build a widget plant in Anytown, Iowa, and borrows money to do so. Under the tax law, part of the interest on the Ioan is allocated to Global Widgets' operations in Kiribati, an island country in the Pacific, even though Global Widgets Kiribati borrowed no money and has no relationship with the lowa operation. As a result, Global Widgets' U.S. affiliate cannot deduct the full amount of its interest expense in the U.S. Moreover, it cannot deduct anything in Kiribati, either, where the government would surely frown on any tax return claiming lowa expenses as a deduction. But any foreign-owned widget maker who wanted to build a plant in the U.S. could deduct all of its interest expense against revenues earned in the U.S. Global would therefore be the high-cost producer, compared to the foreign-owned company operating here.

Here's another example. Suppose a U.S.based multinational manufacturing company buys a major U.S. retailer, with borrowed money. Parts of that borrowing are treated as if they were made by affiliates in far-flung places, wellremoved from the U.S. So part of the tax deduction is lost. But that isn't the end of it. Suppose the retailing arm then borrows money to finance its inventories of lawn mowers in southern California. A portion of that debt is treated as if it were accrued by the parent company's operations in Zimbabwe. So the retailer would have a smaller tax deduction-and higher operating expensesthan a U.S. retailer with no overseas ties, or any of the major retailers, household names all, who have recently been bought by foreign companies.

Our tax law, in other words, needs some intensive rethinking, well beyond the technical fixes currently being made in Congress. We should be thinking about why multinational U.S. companies are treated like second-class citizens, compared to strictly domestic companies. And we should be thinking about why even foreign firms operating here get better tax treatment.

Congress is understandably reluctant to go deeply into reforming tax reform. But sooner or later the bullet will have to be bitten. American tax law needs to be pulled back through the looking glass into the real world, where, one hopes, logic and fairness prevail.



lege who had decided that he wanted to be a reporter. Now, after a year in Wyoming, he was going to show a journalism school graduate how smallmarket TV is really done.

Josh explained that I would have it much easier than he had because he had persuaded management to send out a new camera and tape deck so now at least that much usually worked. Not so the editing machines, which were from another era. No time code, forget the counters, editing was done by feel. He held up a spray-mist bottle. This, he said, was for spraying the carpet to reduce the static electricity which could disrupt the tracking and ruin a story. There was a wire machine and a police scanner; Josh said they often worked but I shouldn't pay much attention to them.

He was trying to make me understand that I should forget what I had learned about newsgathering in Washington, because this would be news *foraging*. I had to come up with stories of interest back in Rapid City and all the other settlements in our vast broadcast area. Josh showed me tapes of some of his finest

achievements — the story on Buckskin Bater, local hunter, trapper, and teller of tall tales; the "spot" news on the kid who was run over in a bed race; the exposé on the dangers of mobile homes, in which Josh rips a trailer apart with his bare hands.

Over the next week, as he explained the responsibilities of the Wyoming bureau correspondent, he emphasized the importance of talking to everybody and asking them all for story ideas.

took over the bureau solo the first week in November, just as the weather turned. It was the coldest November in the state's recorded history. For the first two weeks I did stories on how cold it was, on caring for the cattle and the kids and the trucks, on the care and feeding of wood-burning stoves, but then what? It was the ultimate test of an enterprising journalist, to find a story of general interest when it's thirty degrees below zero and you've just moved to Wyoming. Every morning I racked my brains. I talked to anyone stupid enough to be outside on the street.

I stopped just short of calling people randomly from the phone book to ask them if they had any interesting stories for the news tonight. If coming up with a good story idea was hard, getting the story was even harder. A feature on the guy who tries to keep the mountain roads clear seemed like a good idea. What that meant was trudging through three feet of snow while carrying a fifteen-pound camera, a twenty-pound tape deck, a twenty-pound tripod, and an assortment of five-pound batteries. All this in a blizzard at 11,000 feet. Keeping the equipment functioning, both indoors and out, was a constant battle. That's where Bud the engineer came in.

Bud was the man responsible for making sure that the only TV station in Sheridan kept on broadcasting, not an easy task. He had little contact with, and got little help from, the people in charge back in Rapid City, so he had to improvise. If he needed a circuit board he built it from scratch. Usually he used Tupperware for the backing, a good insulator and easy to make holes in. When things got really nasty up in the mountains, like

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fifty below zero with fifty-mile-an-hour winds, the transmitter would freeze up. So in the middle of the night Bud would jump in his Snowcat, journey up to the peak, climb the tower, and get the thing thawed out and working again.

I somehow came up with a story and got it on the air every day during the Big Freeze. After November, the rest of the winter was relatively mild. A job that had seemed challenging and almost impossible started to seem merely exhausting. I worked six or seven days a week, sometimes twelve hours a day, always alone. I would drive 200 miles for a story, interview people, get some video, edit it back at the bureau, and then beam the package to Rapid City over the microwave transmitter. It was a very solitary, often absurd process. Doing standups was ridiculous. I had to lug an extra light stand with me across prairies and over mountains. When I wanted to do a stand-up, I would raise the light stand to my height and place it where I planned to stand. Then I would set up the camera, focus and compose the shot using my stand-in, turn on the camera, and run in front of it to replace Mr. Lightstand. It's an odd sensation, talking seriously to a camera about something in the middle of a prairie.

Since I was alone out there, there was no one to stop me from being stupid. So when I did a story on a wilderness rescue team, I decided the best way to get some good video would be to hang from a nylon rope over a 200-foot gorge with the camera strapped to my back.

After about eight months on the job, I was settling in, getting to know mountain men, learning to fly-fish, learning to rope. My string ties and black cowboy boots had become a trademark. The work was getting easier but it was still frustrating. I was constantly filing stories but there was no time to think about how to structure them. Running the bureau meant, among other things, running the vacuum and cleaning the toilet. In July someone reminded me that it wouldn't be long before it was winter again. It had been an instructive crash course in enterprise reporting, but by then I was spent. In September, with the temperature dropping fast, I left to take a job in a real newsroom in Savannah.

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## COMMENT



## Darts and laurels: Campaign '88

Dart: to The Associated Press, for the shades-of-McCarthy caption that accompanied its September 28 wirephoto of a meeting between Eduard Shevardnadze, foreign minister of the Soviet Union, and Michael Dukakis, Democratic candidate for president of the United States, to wit: CARD CARRIERS.

Dart: to James J. Kilpatrick and Universal Press Syndicate, distributor of his column, for a disingenuous way of setting the record straight. "It's been brought to our attention that there is an error in the Kilpatrick release dated 10/27," ran Universal's October 28 advisory to Kilpatrick subscribers. "In the fifth graf, second sentence, Kilpatrick refers to a furlough program begun by Dukakis's Democratic predecessor. In fact, it was begun by a Republican governor, Francis Sargent, in the 1970s. If you haven't already used the column, we recommend simply that you strike the clause 'enacted during the term of his Democratic predecessor.' Thanks for your cooperation."

Dart: to KUTV, Salt Lake City, and reporter Reece Stein, for an unguarded defense of a favorite cause. In the midst of controversial charges that the Indiana National Guard had provided vice-presidential candidate Dan Quayle with safe haven from the draft during the Vietnam War, KUTV aired a puffy profile of Utah's Guard unit, stressing its readiness for active duty in the event of an outbreak of war in Korea. The segment neglected to mention that reporter Stein sometimes wears another cap — that of public affairs officer in the Utah National Guard.

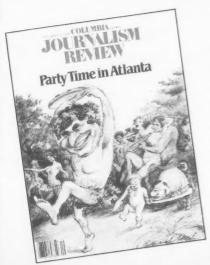
Dart: to the Clarksville, Tennessee, Le. f-Chronicle, and editor Dee Bryant, for an unprofessionally narrow view of received opinion. As recounted by syndicated columnist Mike Royko in an October 18 piece, Bryant was so unhappy with some ten of Royko's columns "bashing" Bush and Quayle that she not only cancelled the columns but also wrote to Royko's distributor asking for a refund. When the syndicate refused and the correspondence was routinely forwarded to Royko, he phoned the editor at her paper and offered to send her his personal check for the \$17.50 that the ten columns, at \$1.75 apiece, had cost her — the only condition being that she would stop buying his column for good in order to relieve him of any future guilt (not to say

expense). He also asked her if she had ever cancelled a syndicated column by conservative commentator Patrick Buchanan. The answer, Royko reported, was no. "Uh, you see, Buchanan is, well he writes about politics," the editor explained.

Dart: to Washington insider Michael Ledeen, for a journalistic faux pas. As revealed by Eleanor Randolph in the November 21 Washington Post, Ledeen palmed off on Le Figaro, the conservative French daily, an Election Day exclusif that purported to represent his one-on-one interview with president-elect Bush but which, in fact, was based on questions answered over the telephone by Andrew Carpendale, an aide to a senior foreign policy adviser in the Bush campaign. "I was talking to Ledeen, and Ledeen should have understood it was me speaking," Carpendale told Randolph. "Usually a journalist makes a distinction between the spokesman and the person himself."

Dart: to the Memphis, Tennessee, Commercial Appeal, for a self-indulgent waste of precious space. In its post-Election Day edition of November 9, the paper filled an eight-by-six-inch box on its editorial page with an excitedly scrawled note "from the desk of Scott Stantis," in which the paper's cartoonist explained that there was no cartoon that day because his wife was having a baby. "Both mother and child are doing well," the appended caption read. "The same cannot be said for Michael Dukakis."

Dart: to Lew Marcus, city hall reporter and political columnist for the Scranton, Pennsylvania, Scrantonian Tribune, for journalistic prostitution on both sides of the street. When his \$10,000 proposal to provide consulting services to the Democratic candidate for state attorney general was rejected by the candidate's campaign manager on conflict-of-interest grounds (though not before Marcus had gotten \$2,500 up front), the enterprising journalist simply sold his services to the Republican candidate instead. According to the rival Morning Times, which broke the story on October 8, Marcus's actions resulted in his suspension from his paper. (He was subsequently fired.) "I don't have anything to explain," Marcus told the Morning Times. "What I do as a reporter is for public consumption. How I live my life is private."



## JOURNALISM REVIEW

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Dart: to the Cullman, Alabama, *Times*, and publisher Robert Bryan, for putting a comic twist on political censorship. Unhappy over the pro-Dukakis leanings of one of the main characters in the syndicated comic strip *Cathy*, Bryan not only killed the strip but also ran a "Vote for Bush" ad — paid for by Bryan himself — in *Cathy*'s usual space. Laurel: to the Portland *Oregonian*, for its sensible handling of *Cathy*'s uncomfortably serious message. Unlike the dozens of papers — including the *Raleigh News and Observer* and the *Los Angeles Times* — that sent her on vacation, *The Oregonian* simply moved her to its op-ed page.

Dart: to The Sacramento Bee, for the less-than-subtle spin on its front-page story on October 6, the morning after the Bentsen-Quayle debate: VP FACE-OFF LEAVES BUSH 'VERY PROUD.' In the ensuing storm of protest from outraged readers, ombudsman Art Nauman in an October 16 column offered an eye-opening glimpse of the editorial process at work. It seems that, having rejected both the unappealing blandness of a strictly neutral headline and the risky alternative of one confirming its own reporter's judgments, the Bee's headline writers had groped through the story until they found an interpretation they could live with — in the thirty-second paragraph of the piece.

Dart: to *The Washington Times*, for not letting the facts get in the way of a juicy anti-Dukakis story. The paper's August 4 follow-up on all those ugly rumors that the Democratic candidate had undergone psychiatric treatment for depression quoted Dukakis's sister-in-law as saying, "It's possible, but I doubt it. It may have been on a friendly basis, one friend to another in private. I don't know . . . . I wasn't with him all the time"; the distorting headline read DUKAKIS KIN HINTS AT SESSIONS. (On August 10, one of the reporters on the story, Gene Grabowski, resigned in protest over the handling of his report; soon after, co-reporter Amy Bayer departed as well.)

Laurel: to *The New Republic*, for its profound grasp of media law. In its pre-election issue (dated November 14), the magazine presciently observed that, since it is an "iron law of the media" that journalistic conventional wisdom always reverses itself, the public could expect to see revisionist stories in the nation's press about the new vice-president, should the Bush-Quayle ticket win. Sure enough, just one day after the election, there was B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., in a *New York Times* Man in the News analysis headlined A PARTNER SEASONED BY THE CAMPAIGN, pronouncing Quayle "a different man," a more seasoned and secure man," and "a more mature man with a better appreciation of life. . . . "



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## JOURNALISM REVIEW

## Campaign '88: TV overdoses on the inside dope

by WILLIAM BOOT

he Bush era is nearly upon us and the shoal of political correspondents is migrating rapidly toward the feeding grounds of a new administration. All eyes are on the future, but I'm going to ask you to cast your mind back several months to October 5, 1988. That evening the networks aired, live from Omaha, the Dan Quayle-Lloyd Bentsen debate. Quayle, you may recall, faltered repeatedly when asked what he would do if he had to take over as president; he spewed out his programmed answers and, after Bentsen hit him with "You're no Jack Kennedy," just seemed to deflate. Even some loyal Republicans were made queasy by his performance — and so, evidently, was the public. By a margin of 51 to 27 percent, 600 people whom ABC polled that night deemed Quayle the loser and about half said he was unfit to assume the presidency.

Curiously enough, here's what some prominent TV commentators told the nation, just after the debate ended but before the poll results were announced, about Quayle's performance:

- "He did a credible job . . . . Most of the time he performed well" Jeff Greenfield, ABC.
- "The bar over which Senator Dan Quayle had to get was pretty low. It seemed to me that he did that. He was calm. He marshaled his arguments rather well" Dan Rather, CBS.
- "No one tonight scored a decisive victory" Tom Brokaw, NBC.
- "No, but I think Dan Quayle did himself a little bit of good . . . . If you were undecided . . . I think you might feel that Dan Quayle is not the kind of hopeless lightweight the Democrats have said he is" John Chancellor, NBC, responding to Brokaw.

What is astonishing is not so much the networks' stretching to be charitable. It's that these were the same news

organizations that just a few weeks earlier had been in frenzied pursuit of Quayle, sharply questioning his record and qualifications. They never got satisfactory answers, but, for reasons I'll touch on shortly, they called off the chase.

And this was by no means the only sharp turn of 1988. As I was monitoring the campaign coverage last fall, with a focus on the networks, news organizations often darted in tandem, first one way, then another; they turned suddenly toward George Bush's Dukakis-bashing rhetoric and away from Michael Dukakis's blander message; toward the idea that Bush had locked up the presidency (e.g., ABC ran a lengthy lead story on October 12 showing Bush with a colossal electoral lead, and the Houston Chronicle wrote on October 15 of a "growing perception that . . . Bush will be the inevitable victor"), then away from it (e.g., ABC, on October 30, reported that Bush aides were nervous because of an apparent Dukakis surge, and Time, on October 31, cited arguments that Dukakis "has the longshot chance to win"), then toward it again (e.g., GOP THOUGHTS TURN TO LANDSLIDE - Richmond Times-Dispatch, November 3; "What might have been . . . should be the Democrats' song



Dwane Powell/The News & Observer (Raleigh)/copyright 1988 Los Angeles Times Syndicate

William Boot is a contributing editor of CIR. Research for this article was underwritten by the Fund for Investigative Journalism.



of lamentation for this year's campaign'' — *Time*, November 7).

Most intriguingly, they turned away from tough scrutiny of candidates' conduct (Gary Hart and Joe Biden must have wondered why it didn't happen sooner) and toward ''inside dope'' stories on candidates' strategies for prevailing on the all-important TV screen. This last topic, television, led the networks into a hall of mirrors where they lost their bearings and began darting toward their own reflections. More about this hall of mirrors a little later.

How can one account for all these sudden shifts in direction? Seeking some scholarly insight, I turned to Dr. Richard Rosenblatt. He is an ichthyologist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, California, and knows a lot about group behavior ("schooling") in fish. Why was it, I asked him, that when schools change direction they seem to do so as one organism, each fish turning almost simultaneously? Rosenblatt explained that the creatures are "oriented on one another" - they use their eyes and a special organ sensitive to water movement (the lateral line) to keep tabs on their fellows and copy their every movement reflexively. "If the first fish turn, everybody turns," he said. "Any fish that gets out of the school is vulnerable prey. There's safety in numbers." For those of us who have covered national presidential campaigns, Rosenblatt's account may sound a bit like a job description.

The top ichthyologists of the 1988 campaign were, of course, Bush's men — campaign chiefs James Baker, Lee Atwater, and media guru Roger Ailes. These three were far more effective than Dukakis's team in exploiting the reporters' safety-in-numbers instinct. They used negative reinforcement and other behavior modification techniques to entice the schooling journalists into their corner. They stirred the water and sprinkled food in just the right way to make the fish turn in useful directions at strategic moments.

Negative reinforcement included the notorious "Huntington massacre," just after the Republican convention, in which reporters clamoring to question Quayle finally were permitted to do so — in his home town, over a live microphone, before a loudly booing pro-Quayle crowd — and were made to look like bullies. After Huntington, reporters faced booing crowds frequently at stops along the Bush-Quayle campaign trail. The pursuit of Quayle slackened, perhaps not coincidentally, and by the time of the debate

with Bentsen he was being given the benefit of a great many doubts. (For the record, James Baker denied that Huntington was an anti-press setup.)

Among other techniques employed by Ailes and Baker were tricks perfected by Michael Deaver & Co. in the Reagan campaigns of 1980 and 1984. Here (encapsulated in a sound-bite, as is only fitting) is the Deaver approach — "Read my lips: No access. Daily visuals. Simple message. See Dick clap. See Jane cheer. See Dick and Jane vote Republican." Adhering religiously to that credo, Bush's handlers kept reporters at such a distance from the candidate that some resorted to binoculars and megaphones. And at least once a day they cast their bait — carefully staged visuals concocted to exploit TV's hunger for lively pictures. With the bait came a hook, the so-called message of the day, usually a barbed one-liner about Dukakis. With astonishing frequency, the networks bit, the hook was set, and TV was running with the Republican message.

Here's an example of just how well the Republican technique worked:

Labor Day, September 5. NBC's Lisa Myers reports on Bush campaigning in Disneyland. We see Bush surrounded by U.S. Olympic athletes and folks dressed up like Disney cartoon characters. He awards gold medals in the shape of Mickey Mouse heads to the Seoul-bound athletes. Cut to scene of Bush at lectern, with Mickey Mouse dressed in red-white-and-blue Uncle Sam garb standing beside him.

Myers (voice-over): "Sometimes it pays to be vice-president"

Bush (to athletes): "You're representing the country of the little guy. No matter what the circumstances of your birth and background, you can go anywhere and do anything."

Cut to the Andover-Yale-Skull-and-Bones man, sleeves rolled up, unloading fish at a San Diego cannery. (Myers: "To identify with the little guy.") Then cut to Bush at lectern, San Diego Harbor as a backdrop, firing a salvo at Dukakis: "I wouldn't be surprised if he thinks that a naval exercise is something you find in Jane Fonda's workout book."

Note: No press conference, no access, yet Bush images compliantly mongered, along with the scripted messages: Bush is no elitist but Dukakis is an exotic lefty.

he Dukakis people were simply no match in this contest to reel in "free media." Dukakis's incredible slowness in responding to Bush's attacks left him mauled in the battle of the sound-bites. Ultimately, Dukakis did hit back and even emulated Bush's p.r. approach to some extent, cutting back on press conferences, staging more events purely to be photographed (e.g., he staged a cross-country trip for the sole purpose of being photographed viewing Yellowstone Park forest fires), and pounding home a simple-minded slogan: "We're on your side." But the Democrat never put himself totally off limits to reporters, even when he was politically wounded. This openness drew some hungry predators, as illustrated rather poignantly by the following case, courtesy of ABC:

October 19. We see the governor in shirt sleeves speaking



"I'm still undecided - I like Dukakis's makeup and camera angles, but I'm impressed with Bush's backdrops and twentysecond sound-bites!"

at an outdoor rally in Illinois. He denounces the Bush people for purveying "garbage . . . political garbage" - referring to a brochure declaring that criminals such as the notorious Massachusetts rapist-on-furlough Willie Horton would be voting for Dukakis.

Cut to scene on a campaign motorcade bus, where we see Dukakis struggling ineffectually to close his window. It seems that Sam Donaldson and crew have been given access to the candidate's own bus. (That alone would have constituted news had it occurred on the Bush campaign.) Donaldson: "Did you see in the paper that Willie Horton said if he could vote he would vote for you?" Dukakis (face impassive, eyes averted from Donaldson, still struggling with window): "He can't vote, Sam."

Dukakis had tried to go on the attack at his rally, but by responding to Donaldson he slumped back on the defensive. He had "stepped on his message," as they say in today's politics.

This was a mistake that Roger Ailes had coached Bush to avoid like poison. During Bush's famous foray to Boston Harbor to blast Dukakis as a pollution-coddler, reporters sought to question the vice-president on his own environmental record. Bush brushed them off with a frankness bordering on gall: "We're not taking any questions . . . . We want the message to be on what I got to say later." He

felt confident he could get away with it, and he did.

One can't blame Donaldson for asking Dukakis the Willi Horton question. But more broadly speaking one has to question the perverse pattern of rewarding candidates who refuse to answer questions, while circling the more accessible ones like sharks. Should the networks have been airing Bush's visuals and sound-bites, which were tantamount to free campaign commercials, while he was hiding from reporters?

t isn't as if television was unprepared for the likes of Baker and Ailes in 1988. There had been a great deal of soul-searching in the news business following 1984, when the insulated Reagan team had spun its hallucinations so easily. There were, in fact, some major improvements in 1988. Among other things, the networks seemed to devote a little more airtime to campaign issues of substance such as the deficit; they painstakingly, if sometimes belatedly, corrected misstatements made by the candidates during the debates; by the end of the race, they were even running point-by-point rebuttals of the most egregiously misleading campaign ads. CNN, for its part, transcended television's traditional superficiality, at least for a half-hour a day, with its Inside Politics '88 program. But these improvements, welcome though they were, came through rather faintly in the daily din of sound-bites and visuals. As Garrick Utley put it in an October 23 NBC Sunday Today report on campaign coverage: "It is the candidate's message, visually and verbally, which has the greatest impact."

The most astonishing thing about campaign coverage in 1988 was that so much of it was about media manipulation - highly introspective and self-critical. "Is TV doing its job . . . . What is happening here? Is it reporting or a political commercial or both?" asked Utley. Tom Brokaw, in a November 6 special, asked whether the Republican media chieftains had been exploiting the networks. ABC's Ted Koppel devoted a full hour to press performance a day after the election, etc. (Major newspapers also weighed in: TV MANIPULATION IN THE '88 CAMPAIGN, POLITICS GETS THE UPPER HAND — Boston Globe, October 24; FRUSTRATED REPORTERS ADD MEGAPHONES, BINOCULARS TO NOTEPADS Washington Post, November 2; etc.)

## Doonesbury

Doug !



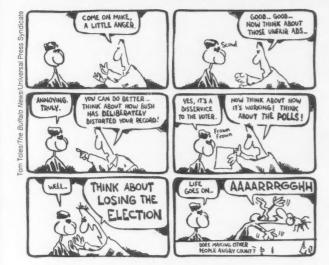


I JUST WANTED TO LET YOU





#### BY GARRY TRUDEAU



This news-media hand-wringing ran in cycles: staged events were compliantly aired, then they were exposed as manipulative, then a new round of reports on visuals was aired, and then these, too, were picked apart or derided on the air. Frequently this bizarre cycle was repeated in a single report, with the correspondent mongering a campaign's concocted images but at the same time stressing such terms as "backdrop," "choreographed," and "staged." Consider Brit Hume's October 28 ABC report on a Bush visit to a California Highway Patrol Academy:

We see a police car skidding dramatically in a demonstration of high-speed-chase training. Cut to a watchful Bush. We see patrol cars driving in formation. Cut to Bush. Then cut to new scene of candidate surrounded by cheering uniformed cops, receiving plaque from beefy officer. Officer: "America's number one crimefighter award!" Finally, we hear Bush's attack line: "The [Democratic] leadership, much of it, is a remnant of the sixties, the New Left, those campus radicals . . . ."

Meanwhile, in his voice-over, Hume all but mocks the contrived proceedings: "Bush didn't get to go to Disneyland today, but, given the enthusiasm he's shown for law enforcement in this campaign, he probably thought the place he did go was even better . . . . Bush didn't go on the rides they have here, but he watched with obvious interest and later he got some prizes — a jacket and a cap, which he didn't put on, and a plaque with a billy club on it."

Hume was evidently trying to function as a kind of consumer's warning label (Caution: what you're seeing is a setup), but as an old TV pro he must know that verbal disclaimers of this sort are close to futile. Mark Crispin Miller of Johns Hopkins University said recently (Sunday Today, October 23): "A visual image is always going to overwhelm a mere voice that accompanies it — the pictures will win out, and that's something that the most adept handlers really understand. I'm afraid not enough TV reporters understand . . . ." Miller later told me, "These correspondents seem to think that their discussion is so articulate that it will erase the effects of the footage." He appears to

be right about the impact of visuals. After my first viewing of the Bush-cops broadcast, the main thing that stayed in my mind was not Hume's sarcasm; it was the image of a speeding police car and a quick cut to the vice-president—an almost subliminal linkage between the candidate and the forces of justice. "Poppy" Bush and Don Johnson.

On the whole, network correspondents seemed to have few serious objections to taking what they were given each day by the image mongers. CBS's Bob Schieffer told Utley in the Sunday Today report: "It is not our business to make the agenda or to make the debate." Lisa Myers of NBC seemed to think that Deaver/Ailes-style campaigning was a pillar of American democracy: "From a reporter's point of view this kind of campaign is frustrating. But from a politician's point of view it's absolutely necessary. Because it's only by hammering away at the same message day after day that the message gets through to the American people." As if sound-bite politics were an institution, something to include in a civics text.

Others in the TV news business made more radical noises, vowing to shake themselves free of the grip of the demon visual. *The New York Times* reported on October 4:

"If the photo opportunity of the day is simply a visual with no substantive core we should walk away from it," said the NBC news correspondent Andrea Mitchell . . . .

Brian M. Healy [of] CBS News, said the [Bush] flag factory [event] was really the last straw. "They're going to have to earn their way onto the air," he said.

rave talk, but of course nothing really changed. On Sunday, October 30, for instance, Bush went to Pennsylvania on a trip laid on at the last minute to demonstrate that he was not complacent about his lead. He performed a few stunts for the camera — catching a football on the tarmac at Andrews Air Force Base, bellowing to crowds through a bullhorn in Pennsylvania, and posing with a Catholic prelate decked out in photogenic red trappings. He said nothing of consequence, even by the special standards of his own campaign, yet he made it onto the networks, getting heavy coverage on ABC. The "substantive core" of ABC's story can be summarized as follows: "George Bush wanted some free TV advertising. We gave it to him." Correspondent Mike von Fremd's only complaint was that Bush, less well-choreographed than usual, "often [had] his back to the cameras.'

Often had his back to the cameras? That comment suggests the depths to which TV news had descended — faulting the candidate's competency at manipulating TV news itself. More broadly, it points up the networks' preoccupation with politics as performance, with the mechanics and strategies of political persuasion and all the little details of life in the campaign fishbowl. As Tom Brokaw said self-consciously of the tight circle of politicians, campaign aides, pollsters, and political reporters who run together in a presidential election year: "We kind of speak our own language, live in our own universe, have our own culture." He can say that again — and note the word "we."

After both of the Bush-Dukakis debates (September 25 and October 13), the network correspondents dwelt heavily

on the candidates' skills as television actors. In their new role as drama critics, the correspondents seemed to be telling viewers that what was really important was how well a would-be president could project qualities such as:

• Nonchalance, when he was probably quite nervous. ("I think it was [Bush's] body language throughout. He seemed more confident and relaxed.... I saw a comparable change in Dukakis, but I thought Bush did it in a more believable way" — NBC's John Chancellor, October 13.)

• Likeability, when it may not come naturally. ("[Dukakis] . . . wanted to show he was a sympathetic figure. He smiled a lot . . . but I'm not sure that in that ninety minutes he came across as anybody's idea of their favorite uncle'' — NBC's Chris Wallace, September 25.)

• A mature understanding of TV camera angles. ("I noticed . . . how Dukakis played to the camera . . . . When he answered a question . . . he looked straight into the camera" — ABC's Jim Wooten, September 25.)

You may be thinking that there are other, more important considerations in choosing a president. Well, the networks agreed. They heavily stressed two other vital factors, sound-bites and spin doctors, and virtually made them into house-hold words.

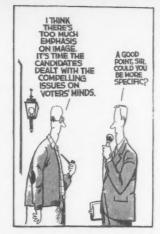
No sooner did each debate end than the networks were harping on which candidate had produced the most memorable bites. After the second debate, for example, NBC's Ken Bode told viewers: "[An] exchange you are liable to see tomorrow on the instant television replays had to do with labels . . . and this is how it looked." (Cut to sound-bites.)

Is it just me, or is there something downright daft about predicting on the air which snippets you are likely to broadcast the next day? Over on CBS, sound-bites kept coming up like King Charles's head when Dan Rather had the floor.

## ABC's story can be summarized as follows: 'George Bush wanted some free TV advertising. We gave it to him'

"Senator Bradley?" Dan inquired after the September 25 debate. "If you were putting together a campaign commercial for Michael Dukakis and you wanted to use a George Bush sound-bite out of this, what would you use?" He then asked New Hampshire Governor John Sununu: "What Dukakis sound-bite would you use in a George Bush commercial?" A few minutes later, his intensity building, Rather asked Republican pollster David Keene: "Now, Dave, let's turn it around. You're making a George Bush commercial and you're looking for a sound-bite of George Bush . . . . What's his best shot?" etc.

Sadly, two weeks later, shortly after the close of the second Bush-Dukakis debate, a perplexed-sounding Rather broke this news to viewers: "There weren't many, I didn't hear or see many *sound-bites*." But correspondent Bruce





Morton jumped to his rescue with a key insight: "One of [Dukakis's] problems in this whole campaign is that his message doesn't sound-bite as easily." Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it's official — "sound-bite" is now a verb.

Then there were the spin doctors, the partisans for each candidate who besieged the pressroom after the debates and became another 1988 network obsession. On the one hand, the networks treated them as figures of fun, so predictable and biased that correspondents could not keep straight faces. On the other hand, they were regarded in a strange, convoluted way as campaign soothsayers. If you interpreted corrrectly what their utterances *really* signified, you had discovered the ultimate inside dope.

Consider this exchange, following the October 13 debate: Dan Rather (lightheartedly): Their handlers — and don't they have a lot of them? — have been nonstop on what's called spin patrol, descending on the assembled reporters, trying to influence press accounts. Lesley Stahl joins us now from the eye of the spin storm. Lesley?

Stahl (smiling): Frankly, it's getting a bit like a broken record. We're spinning round and round and round and round.... All the handlers standing right up next to each other, Republicans and Democrats, with hordes of reporters crowding in to hear a good sound-bite.... And standing next to me, Dan, are three reporters who have been spun.... This is Mark Nelson, first, of The Dallas Morning News.... Let's ask him first what the Bush spinners are saying.

Nelson: The Bush people are very happy. They think the vice-president did exactly what he had to do . . . .

Stahl: You gonna write that in your paper tomorrow? Nelson: I don't know . . . . We don't believe everything we hear from these guys.

Stahl, still in a joking mood, then asks Bob Drogin of the Los Angeles Times what the Dukakis spinners are saying.

Drogin (smiling): Even before [the debate] started, one of the Dukakis aides came up to me and said, "In case I don't catch you later, we're elated." And they're trying to keep that up. . . .

At this point, the banter stops as Stahl turns to Linda Breakstone of the Los Angeles Herald Examiner and asks the touchstone question. Stahl: What's the difference between the two spinning teams? Do you feel one side is genuinely more elated than the other?

Breakstone (earnestly): I think the Bush people are happier. They're calmer about their spin. The Dukakis people are a little afraid of their own spin . . . . Lee Atwater [the Bush campaign leader] . . . . is very calm about it, secure about it.

The Stahl-Breakstone exchange illustrates one of the real innovations in campaign reporting last year — the quest for what one might call "genuine spin." Through appraisal of the posture, voice, tone, and facial expressions of the spin doctors after a major campaign event, you make a judgment as to which candidate's quacks are lying least. That's the candidate who "won." Oh, I forgot — another criterion is the speed at which the spin doctors reach the press area from the debate arena, as in: "Tonight the Bush people were literally bounding into this room" (Lisa Myers, NBC, October 13). The campaign that wins the post-debate 100-yard dash to the press room also wins the debate. Perhaps the Federal Election Commission should begin testing for steroids in 1992.

peaking of sports, political reporters assumed a role akin to sportswriters in 1988. This was in keeping with a long tradition of "value-free" political reporting. But in '88 the limitations of that tradition became more painfully apparent than ever before. For much of the race, journalists discussed an unprecedented flood of inaccurate charges and misleading television campaign ads in terms of the effectiveness of a candidate's "game plan." The focus was on strategy, not content or legitimacy — to wit: HOW THE FURLOUGH ISSUE BECAME A STRATAGEM OF THE BUSH FORCES (Washington Post, October 28); or, again, "Bush... moved early to offset a major potential negative, casting Dukakis as the polluter with his dramatic 'raid' on polluted Boston Harbor..." (Boston Globe, October 23).

It was not until the Bush camp ran its notoriously inaccurate "tank ad" attacking Dukakis that TV news saw fit

## After a debate you make a judgment as to which candidate's quacks are lying least. That's the candidate who 'won'

to correct the record. The ad — which appropriated footage of an ill-conceived Democratic visual in which Dukakis rode in a tank, grinning goofily — claimed he opposed several weapons that he, in fact, supported. On October 19, ABC ran a point-by-point rebuttal of the Republican ad and other networks followed suit (as did a number of newspapers). By then, unfortunately, several factually dubious Bush ads had been running for weeks, all but unchallenged in the press, among them the "furlough" spot showing prisoners going through a revolving door and implying falsely that,



"I dunno — I kinda like what Bush said about a thousand pints of Lite."

under Dukakis, 268 Willie Horton clones had been released.

Not only were news organizations late in zeroing in on the inaccuracies; they were overly cautious in what they said, bending so far backward to appear balanced and non-partisan that they gave the impression both candidates were equally at fault in the distortion game. The Dukakis camp did claim misleadingly in one ad that Bush had voted to cut Social Security (in fact, he had voted to cut a cost-of-living raise — a cut that would have weakened a pensioner's buying power). But University of Texas professor Kathleen Hall Jamieson, who has written books on the history of campaign advertising and who studied the 1988 TV commercials closely, says the Bush campaign was the more flagrant offender by far, perpetrating the most blatantly distorted TV spots ever aired in a presidential race.

Jamieson told me that, when she was invited to appear on network talk shows (Good Morning America, Sunday Morning, etc.) to discuss distorted ads, an equal number of cuts from Bush and Dukakis spots would be shown, giving the false impression that the two sides were "equally sleazy and unfair." Jamieson added, "It was very difficult, given that visual structure, to make the point that Bush's ads were, one, effective and, two, lies, and that Dukakis's ads were, one, ineffective and, two, truthful."

That impression of equal culpability was widely circulated, in print as well as on the air. Newsweek, in a cover article illustrated with a Garry Trudeau cartoon showing Dukakis and Bush hurling mud at each other, declared: "There was blame enough to spare for the flying mud" (October 31). In an October 10 report — 2 SIDES ESCALATE AIRWAVES WAR OF NEGATIVE ADS — The New York Times equated Dukakis's efforts to counter distorted ad attacks ("Do you believe it when George Bush tells you he's going to be the environmentalist president?") with Bush's original attacks.

There are limits to what news organizations can do to correct lies and distortions during a presidential campaign. "Single news segments cannot erase dozens of exposures to a sludge-clotted Boston Harbor," as Jamieson put it. When a candidate fails to carry the burden of rebuttal, as Dukakis failed to do for much of the race, that makes it all the harder for reporters to patrol as accuracy cops, because they might be accused of serving as surrogates for the silent candidate.

Nevertheless, commercial television had a special obligation to counter the distortions. For one thing, commercial TV was the original breeding ground for sound-bite politics. For another, it carried Bush's allegations, unchallenged, to millions of homes. TV's obligation is even more compelling given its role in creating what *The Washington Post*'s Lloyd Grove has termed the "perpetual fusion" of news and advertising. News broadcasts have borrowed techniques from TV commercials (shorter bites, quicker cuts, flashier graphics, more attention to camera angles), while campaign commercials have aped the style of news and exploited impressions created on the TV news. All of this causes public confusion — an *Adweek* study in early September showed that a number of viewers mistook news reports for commercials.

onfusion was compounded in 1988 by a proliferation of television news reports about commercials, of commercials inspired by news reports, and of commercials about commercials. Consider Dukakis's "tank" event: in the beginning was a campaign visual, and the visual begat news reports making light of the stunt ("Biff! Bang! Powie!" was how Bruce Morton of CBS summed it up); and these begat a Republican attack commercial ridiculing Dukakis, and the Republican attack commercial begat more news reports, and all of the above begat a Dukakis ad attacking the Republican attack commercial. The Dukakis spot spawned even more news reports. These generally showed the correspondent standing beside a TV set on which could be seen an angry Dukakis, himself standing beside a TV set, on which could be seen footage of Dukakis on the tank in the Republican ad. The paragraph you are now reading is, as nearly as I can calculate, at least four (or is it five?) times removed from the original visual, a phony event to begin with.

There are several things television could have done in 1988 to break us free from this crazy world and restore some reality to the campaign. Initiatives along the following lines might have been especially interesting:

Dan Rather: Seven days after the Labor Day campaign kickoff, and the two presidential candidates are still ducking major issues. Nothing from either on what programs they would cut to fight the deficit . . . . (Cut to end of broadcast.) And that's the way it is, Monday, September 12, the seventh day of general-election waffling by the two major party candidates for president. (This closing line would be repeated daily unless or until the candidates grappled with the substantive issues.)

Peter Jennings: ABC can report tonight that the major networks have invited George Bush and Michael Dukakis to participate in a series of weekly debates. One on one. Specific topics, starting with the deficit. If one man agrees and the other declines, the first will be given an hour of prime time per week to use in any way he sees fit.

Tom Brokaw: George Bush spent the day in his campaign cocoon again, avoiding reporters. He appeared as usual at a carefully choreographed event before a friendly audience, in this case an Orthodontists for Bush rally in Sarasota, Florida. You won't be seeing any film of that visit. The reason: NBC has imposed the following conditions on our campaign coverage: film of candidates' staged events will be shown only on days when they hold press conferences. Bush did not hold one today.

Of course, in reality, the networks are petrified at the idea of using their maximum power to improve electioneering. (Yes, ABC invited the candidates to debate on the Ted Koppel show, but that was a one-time shot, late in the campaign, on October 25. Dukakis had to submit to Koppel's tough interrogation, solo, for ninety minutes. This in itself might have persuaded Bush to stay off the air, letting his rival be the one to writhe alone.) The networks' fear stems in part from questions about their own identity: Is network TV the playing field on which candidates contend, making it inappropriate for the networks to redraw the boundaries during the game and compelling them to assume a totally passive role? Is it a detached interpreter of the campaign, thus largely passive? Is it an active player — a character cop, accuracy policeman, arbiter of what the issues should be? Most of the time the networks don't seem to know which role to emphasize and uncertainty breeds weakness. The more passive roles held sway for much of the

In any event, it's all over now and we ended up with George Herbert Walker Bush. Within a short time of inauguration, God willing, he will hold his first press conference as president. I can already imagine the big evening. It is 8:45 and Bush and his wife sit contentedly before a roaring fire in the family living quarters, a dog at their feet. At length Bush yawns, stretches, sets down his teacup, and gets to his feet. "Well, Barbara," he says. "Tension City. I've got to go and feed the fish."



Rob Rogers/The Pittsburgh Press/United Feature Syndicate

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Middle row:

Olga Rakich WGBH Educational Foundation Boston, Massachusetts

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Guy W. Webster The Arizona Republic Phoenix, Arizona

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Victor Lozano Mexican Institute of Television and Excelsior newspaper Mexico City

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## Seattle's press and the case of the judge who killed himself

by LESLIE BROWN

n the third paragraph of a three-page special report that ran in the August 19 Seattle Post-Intelligencer, reporter Duff Wilson described the troubled past of King County Superior Court Judge Gary Little as "a personal history... that has been ticking like a time bomb." The judge, who had been told that the article would probably appear that day, never read it. On August 18, about an hour before the first edition carrying Wilson's report rolled off the presses, Little put a .38 caliber pistol to his head and killed himself in an empty hallway outside his judicial chambers.

Wilson's special report - three long stories that had taken six months to prepare for publication - detailed allegations that had circulated as rumors in Seattle for many years. Based on interviews with five alleged victims, the stories described the way Little - as an assistant attorney general and part-time teacher at an exclusive prep school in the late 1960s and early 1970s — had used his social standing and power to coerce male students into having sexual relations with him. Wilson also brought the story into the 1980s, outlining allegations linked to Little's seven-year career as a judge. According to these allegations, Little had repeatedly met with male juvenile offenders outside of the courtroom, taking them to dinner, to his home, even to his cabin on an island north of Seattle. In his last interview with Wilson, Little said he had done nothing wrong as a judge except for unintentionally violating the rules against out-of-court contacts with defendants.

Wilson's report focused on the failure of the institutions that had the power to act aggressively on reports of Little's alleged misconduct, and it is this failure that has become the key issue in the dozens of stories that have run in the Seattle press since Little's death. But in the wake of the judge's suicide, the Little

story has also become a story about the press. As the *P-I*'s afternoon competitor, *The Seattle Times*, observed on the day the suicide made headlines, the press was one of the institutions that failed. "Some say the Gary Little story was neglected too long by the Seattle news media," wrote *Times* staff reporter Eric Nalder in an article headed MEDIA HAD BEEN SCRUTINIZING ALLEGATIONS ABOUT LITTLE FOR YEARS. "Others say it is a story that should never have been printed."

Over the years, a number of reporters had heard bits and pieces of the Gary Little story. Some had attempted to report it: the P-I in 1981, the Times in 1985, and KING-TV, also in 1985. The P-I's courthouse reporter interviewed three men who said that as teenagers they had been sexually exploited by Little. but the reporter was unable to persuade the men to sign affidavits that they would testify should a lawsuit be brought against the paper. (Wilson, seven years later, was able to secure these affidavits.) In the case of the Times, reporter Peyton Whitely wrote a story about Little's out-of-court contacts with juvenile offenders. Whitely had obtained the names of two of Little's alleged schoolboy victims, but, he says, he was not encouraged to follow up on this lead. Indeed, his editors pulled him off the investigative beat and no one was reassigned to the story. KING-TV had gotten farther. After nearly a year of investigation, the station was on the verge of airing a series about Little's secret life - including taped interviews with four alleged victims of Little's sexual advances - when the president of the station's parent company decided not to air the story.

Not surprisingly, the press's failure to report what some have called an open secret about an influential judge has given rise to speculation that powerful people leaned on the press to keep quiet. One person who holds to this conspiracy-of-silence theory is B. Colin Clif-

ford, a businessman, a graduate of the prep school at which Little taught, and a key source for all three news organizations that looked into the story. "Seattle's a small town, and people can't write certain stories about a certain social strata," Clifford says. "Take a look at who Gary Little was surrounding himself with — the Who's Who of Seattle. It wasn't ineptitude that kept this story from coming out; it was a conscious decision by people not to run it."

Others say Little's alleged sexual misconduct escaped media scrutiny because the allegations were old and because Little was an extraordinarily popular judge. Also at work, several newspeople have suggested, was another factor: a failure to distinguish between pedophilia and homosexuality. "I was aware," says Kathleen Triesch, the Times's assistant city editor for special projects, "that we had gotten more than one phone call that said, 'Do you know that Gary Little does it with boys?' It was never clear to me that what we were talking about was Gary Little being a pedophile. I don't think many people in 1985, certainly not

Judge Gary Little



Leslie Brown is a reporter for the Tacoma, Washington, Morning News Tribune.

me, really fully understood what a pedophile was."

At the same time, editors and reporters alike were determined not to engage in gay-bashing. Don McGaffin, a veteran broadcast journalist who worked at KING-TV for several years and is now semi-retired as the result of a stroke, says, "This was a decision made in the hearts of many of us: we will not report the fact that he was a homosexual. That's how wonderful we are. How *not* so wonderful we are is that when he became a judge and we heard more rumors, we did nothing."

ittle was forty-nine when he killed himself. He was thrust into prominence first as an assistant attorney general assigned to the University of Washington, where he helped to quell riots during the days of student unrest, then as counsel to the Seattle school district, which he assisted in carrying out a controversial desegregation plan. In 1980 he won a seat on the Superior Court bench.

In 1985 two reporters at KING-TV were on the verge of breaking a story similar to the special report that would appear in the Post-Intelligencer three years later. John Wilson, now director of special projects at the station, says that he and a colleague, Jim Compton, spent nearly a year on the investigation and interviewed about 150 people. Like the P-I, the station focused on two separate periods in Little's life - his days at the prep school when he allegedly sexually exploited students and his days as a judge when he arranged to meet young males outside of the courtroom. The five-part series was nearly ready to run, Wilson says, when "it went upstairs to the attorneys."

Sturges Dorrance, KING's general manager, says that Ancil Payne, then president of the station's parent company, decided to kill the story because it lacked what he called a critical link. Juxtaposing the two periods of Little's life suggested that as a judge he sexually molested those young offenders whom he saw outside the courtroom — and that remained to be proved. "What was said [to the reporters] from the beginning," Dorrance recalls, "is that you're going to have to come up with a smoking gun — someone somewhere who's going to



'People say we hounded him to death. That's absurd. He's the one who killed himself.'

Dick Clever, assistant city editor, Seattle Post-Intelligencer

go on the record and say Gary Little did this to me while he was on the bench. The problem was, there didn't seem to be any place where this person was going to come from."

In the same year — 1985 — Seattle Times reporter Peyton Whitely was working on a special report on juveniles in the criminal justice system when he heard allegations about Little's sexual misconduct, including charges that he was at the center of a sex ring operating out of juvenile court. "I remember coming back to the Times and telling people about that," Whitely says, "and people would just roll their eyes and look at you as though you were nuts. One editor told me, 'Peyton, your problem is that you see conspiracies behind everything.' They didn't believe me."

Whitely heard something else — that the county's presiding judge had just barred Little from hearing juvenile court cases because of an improper out-ofcourt contact between Little and a juvenile defendant. This fact formed the lead of a May 1985 story - the first article to appear in the Seattle news media that touched on Little's alleged misconduct. Whitely's story also contained information that three years later would form the centerpiece of the P-I's special report - namely, that the state's commission on judicial conduct had secretly reprimanded Little in 1982 for improper out-of-court contacts with juvenile offenders, including one incident involving a youth who stayed overnight in his

home and another who visited him at his island cabin. But the story made no mention of Little's sexual orientation because when Whitely asked if he were gay, he said he was not. One had to be able to read between the lines to discern the story's significance.

In July of 1988 — after Little had announced that he would not seek a third term, in large part because his out-of-court contacts with juveniles had become a campaign issue — the *Times* decided it was time to take another look at the Little story. Whitely was one of three reporters assigned to this project. The newspaper was in the midst of its new investigation when, on August 19, the *P-I* published its special report. The same day, when the *Times*, as part of its story on Little's death, revealed the information it had gathered, Whitely's name topped the triple-byline story.

So why did it take three years for the Times to follow up on Whitely's leads? Two Times editors, Triesch and city editor Mindy Cameron, say the 1985 effort was abandoned mainly because they had problems with Whitely's work. Triesch, who had edited "Pinball Justice," Whitely's special report on juveniles in the criminal justice system, says that she found it emotionally exhausting to work with Whitely; he could dig up vast amounts of information but, Triesch says, he could not be relied on to sort out what was important from what was not. As a result, she says, she was drowned in copy. Cameron adds that by the time Whitely finally pulled "Pinball Justice" together, he had "a credibility problem" with the newspaper; he did see conspiracies in every corner, she contends. She says that it now seems clear to her that she should have assigned another reporter to the story in 1985. As for the frequently heard charge that the Little story was spiked because the judge's powerful friends brought pressure to bear on the paper, Cameron says, "It's all pure bullshit."

Michael R. Fancher, the *Times*'s executive editor, says he is frustrated by the persistence of these rumors. "You hear the rumor that someone made an appeal to the publisher," he says. "The publisher at that time is dead now. If some citizen in the community called to talk to him about Gary Little, I'm unaware of it. My predecessor is unaware of it. Can we say nobody talked to the publisher? No. But if someone did, he never passed it on to us."

Whitely, who won several national reporting awards before he was taken off the investigative beat, is not sure what led the Times to drop the Little story in 1985. In light of the fact that the judge counted among his friends several of Seattle's most prominent people, including members of the Times's board of directors, it's conceivable, Whitely says, that there's something to the theory that external pressure kept the story on the spike. But, "deep in my heart," he says, he believes three other factors were responsible for the story being killed: Little's prominence - "an intrinsic part of this whole situation is that Gary Little was not some obscure judge"; what Whitely calls a consensus kind of decision-making process at the Times which he thinks can lead to the squelching of more daring enterprises; and Cameron's lack of confidence in him.

While, after the judge's suicide, some people criticized the *Times* for its failure to tell the Little story, others were quick to denounce the *Post-Intelligencer* for having, in effect, hounded the man to his death. A month before the *P-I* published its report, Little had announced that not only would he not seek reelection but he would also move to California and begin a new career — an obvious attempt to step out of the public spotlight and end the rampant speculation about his sex life. Thus, some thought it was

unfair of the press to make Little the target of an investigation and, on the morning the *P-I* broke its story, calls started pouring in to the paper. "I hope Duff Wilson never has another good night's sleep in his life," said one man, according to a log of telephone calls kept on the day the story appeared. Another caller said that she would never look at the *P-I* again.

But public opinion soon began to shift. By the end of the first day the fiftyfive calls the P-I received were nearly evenly split between those in favor of and those opposed to the paper's breaking the story. In the ensuing days, the response became increasingly favorable, and, according to a tally the newspaper kept of its letters to the editor, three out of four of those letters endorsed the P-I's effort. Since then, stories about Little and the apparent failure of the judicial commission to act more decisively on information it had received since 1981 have made front-page headlines in the two newspapers. These stories have led to a tense tug of war between the judicial commission, which is refusing to release its files on Little, and a state senate committee that has filed a subpoena to obtain them. Recently, Wilson filed a story in which he quoted a man who said that, at the age of seventeen, with a jail sentence hanging over him if he violated his probation terms, he was coerced by Little - the judge who had heard his case - into having a sexual relationship.

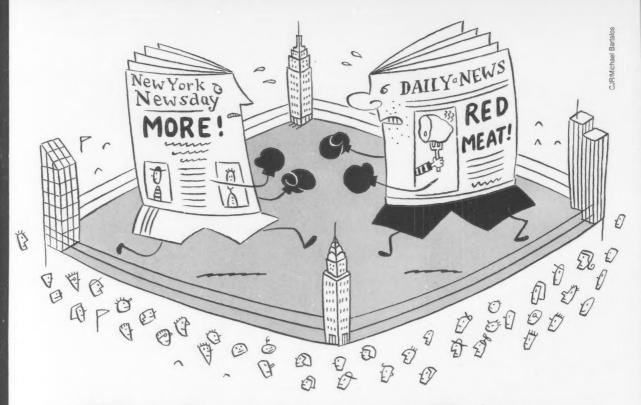
In the course of all the discussion over Judge Little's death, many have asked a question the P-I has refused to answer - namely, whether anyone at the paper was aware that Little, according to a close friend, Camden M. Hall, had been contemplating suicide for at least a month before he took his life. The last time reporter Wilson talked to Little was during the judge's noon break on August 18; during this final telephone interview, Little asked when the story would run and Wilson replied that it would probably appear in the next day's paper. That afternoon, Little telephoned Hall, a senior partner at the P-I's law firm, telling him that the paper was preparing to publish a story about him and that he was considering suicide. At about 10 P.M., Little called Hall for the last time; moments later, he pulled the trigger.

Hall declines to say what he told the

P-I after Little's telephone calls to him. J.D. Alexander, executive editor of the P-I, similarly refuses to comment on whether he was told Little was suicidal. "I don't think I ought to get into that," he says. "I don't think it's appropriate." He does, however, vigorously reject the suggestion that Wilson's call precipitated the judge's decision to take his life, pointing out that the P-I, the Times, and KING-TV had been investigating Little for some time and that Little knew this. Dick Clever, who edited Wilson's special report, says he does not know if Hall called Alexander but adds that, in any case, the paper had an obligation to publish. "I would have told him [Hall] that he had about ten hours to get Little into counseling," Clever says. "People say we hounded him to death. That's absurd. He's the one who killed himself."

uff Wilson, who has been working as an investigative reporter for the past three years, also believes that the Little story had to be written. The fact that Little had decided to step down from the bench and move to California was no reason for Wilson to drop his investigation, the reporter contends, because the stories that constituted his special report were about much more than a single judge. They were about the failures of the system designed to guard against such abuses as those Little had allegedly committed. More important, he adds, they were about the teenagers whom Little allegedly exploited and whose feelings of powerlessness were exacerbated over the years by Little's seeming ability to escape scrutiny.

Even so, Wilson admits, Little's suicide troubled him. In his last conversation with Little, when the judge asked Wilson when the stories would appear and Wilson told him they would probably be in the next day's paper, he thanked Wilson for the information, saying, "I appreciate your telling me that. I will take the appropriate steps." What Little meant, Wilson thought at the time, was that the judge would tell a few close friends about the impending publication and begin preparations for a lawsuit against the P-I. He had no idea that Little's "appropriate steps" would culminate in suicide, and was stunned when they did.



### NY tab-war payoff story!

A three-way free-for-all, led by counterpunching columnists, brings out the best in tab land

by MICHAEL HOYT

n late summer and early fall people watching television around New York City began to see a puzzling series of ten-second ads that featured various parts of someone's body and an urgent, bad-poetry voice-over: These are the eyes/sharp and keen/that well remember/all they've seen-this over a pair of screen-filling and slightly bloodshot peepers. These are the fingers/often heard/that pound the keys/that tap out the words-this over some rapid onefinger-method typing on a portable computer, somehow made to clack like an old Royal. These are the fists/hard and tough—this over these same hands, now clenching and slamming into each other's palms. The hands actually seemed kind of pudgy and benign.

These were the hands, eyes, feet (that pound the street, etc.) of Jimmy Breslin, the heavyweight champion of the New York newspaper columnists. Not only had New York Newsday snatched Breslin away from the New York Daily News, but it had snatched the News's advertising agency, Holland & Calloway, as well, and these two prizes had joined forces to beat up on their old employer. In September the ad campaign would change to a "Breslin switched-How about you?" theme, but the earlier teasers never mentioned the columnist's name. They all ended with some breathless variation of "He's coming! September 11! Only in New York Newsday!"

On September 11, when Breslin

finally did arrive, Mike McAlary and Bob Herbert of the *Daily News* were waiting for him like a pair of muggers hiding around the corner. McAlary, a former investigative reporter hired away from *Newsday* a short while earlier, and Herbert, a former *News* city editor, were part of the *News*'s "new generation" of columnists. The *News*'s current TV campaign shows them in such journalistic activities as putting on trench coats on the run and dialing pay telephones in the rain. Breslin is the champ, so the *News* double-teamed him.

Who won? New York City won.

In McAlary's page-two column we got the story of Nicholas Longo on the night he and the majority on the Yonkers city council were caving in to fines that were crippling that city, just north of the

Michael Hoyt is an associate editor at the Review.

Bronx, and finally agreeing to a courtordered plan to build low-income housing in middle-class white neighborhoods. The fines, doubling every day, would soon have meant municipal layoffs. McAlary depicts Longo reading the names of the city employees who would be the first to go, including Rosemary Doerr, who does most of his secretarial work. Then Longo casts a "yes" vote for the housing plan. McAlary quotes a voice in the crowd: "You snake. We won't forget."

That same day, Herbert wrote an excellent column about Darryl King, who has spent the last seventeen years in prison for the killing of an off-duty rookie cop named Miguel Sirvent during a holdup. Herbert introduces us to a lawyer and a private investigator, an ex-cop named Bo Dietl, who have taken up King's cause and who lay out a convincing array of evidence that he's an innocent man. "If he had killed a cop, I'd put him in the electric chair myself and personally pull the switch," Dietl tells Herbert. "But he didn't do it."

And over in Breslin's roomy corner, on page two of *New York Newsday*, we visit the ninth-floor nursery for long-term baby care at a big hospital in a poor area of Brooklyn. This is a place for infants damaged by AIDS or drugs, and Breslin shows us a rangy male nurse named James Rempel holding an odd-acting child in a blue sweater. Rempel tells us that because the baby's mother smoked so much crack, the baby is mad. We get a column of power and sorrow, putting a human face on the headlines.

It can't, I suppose, but I hope this New York newspaper war goes on and on.

eople raised Catholic are always a little vulnerable to calls for penance and purity. When I was in college, the people I shared a house with somehow convinced me to join them in a new diet which, for the first week, consisted of nothing but brown rice — morning, noon, night. This macrobiotic fad actually killed a few people around the country, but in our case we broke down after three or four days and hastened to a highway diner for a wonderful breakfast of steak and eggs.

In a similar brown-rice sort of vein I changed my news-intake regimen a cou-

ple of years ago: no tabloids, more MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. This fall I could stand it no longer. Maybe it was the presidential campaign: one more bloodless set of spin doctors playing tennis with the issues. Gimme red meat, I thought, and quietly purchased 95 cents worth of New York tabloids.

And what a feast. Back when I had quit them, the *Daily News* was exhausted, the *Post* a joke, and *New York Newsday* too new to notice. Now everything had changed.

Just about everyone I've talked to about this agrees that the level of tabloid journalism in New York has been steadily rising. Most of them cite two main factors: the departure of the *Post*'s Rupert Murdoch and the arrival of Long Island *Newsday*'s offspring, *New York Newsday*. "There was a period where there was a kind of Gresham's law operating," says Michael Oreskes, a *New York Times* reporter who was once city hall bureau chief for the *News*. "I blame the *Post* mostly. The bad was driving out the good. Everybody was being pulled down."

Because he owns a New York television station, Murdoch was obliged under cross-ownership rules to sell either the station or the *Post*; real estate developer Peter S. Kalikow bought the paper in March 1987, and it has been toning down its Fleet Street style since then. When a deranged and unclothed man killed an usher in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in late September, the *Post* was the only New York tabloid not to get the word "naked" onto page one. Alexander Hamilton, who founded the paper in 1801, now makes an appearance in the upper left-hand corner of that page, and a recent *Post* ad tells him not to worry, that his paper is in good hands.

Editorially it is in the hands of Jane Amsterdam, who was hired and promised autonomy last May. Amsterdam is new to newspapers; she has been known as a gifted magazine editor since her days at New Jersey Monthly, where the Jason R. Golden on the masthead turned out to be her pet retriever. The Post has improved its real estate section and hired a solid third columnist, veteran Pete Hamill. Murdoch raised circulation to nearly 1 million at one point (it's about 600,000 now) but never could attract enough advertising to stop bleeding money. Hamill thinks one of his mistakes was to make the Post "so simpleminded that it never got home; you con-



sume it in fourteen minutes on the subway and it ends up in the trash can''—a location advertisers resist. That consumption time may be up a few minutes now, but the *Post* is still the thinnest of the three. It will add some substance on March 5 when it launches a Sunday paper, a \$25 million investment that Kalikow promises will include "more feature stories, [more] investigative and indepth reporting." "In a year or so you won't recognize the *Post*," Hamill says. But for now the newspaper seems to be between personalities.

This is not the case with the Daily News, the streetwise tough guy, the admirer of hero firemen. In News headlines. Jesse Jackson is IAX: John Cardinal O'Connor is o'c. The thirdlargest newspaper in the country has never been burdened with excess subtlety. When former Bronx political boss Stanley Friedman was convicted a second time on corruption charges in late October, a News editorial concluded that he was "scum that rose to the top of the cesspool and, thank the Lord, was scraped off." A speculative story on what a George Bush cabinet would look like quoted a friend of Bush on the possibility of Maureen Reagan becoming United Nations ambassador: "If he picked Quayle he could pick that jarhead." You don't get this kind of perspective in The New York Times.

Like the *Times*, *New York Newsday* has a more genteel, suburban personality than the *News*. *Newsday* offers a lot more international coverage—the *Daily News* concentrates nearly all of its energy on the city—and a fatter life-style and features section. *Newsday*'s innovative editorial pages are almost always more interesting than those of its rivals, and it's the only city paper that offers color photos on page one.

Over at the *News* you can pick up mutterings that *Newsday* is not really a tabloid. "It's really a broadsheet sort of newspaper," says *News* columnist Bob Herbert. "Part of the idea of a tabloid is to be sharp and snappy." "Look at their garbage thing," sniffs a *News* editor, referring to a ten-part *Newsday* series on solid waste that ran last winter. "It's an incredibly extensive series that I'm sure nobody read." But most competitors are more generous. "*New York Newsday* has shown that you could be a

tabloid and still be good, that you don't have to be *The Christian Science Monitor*," says Pete Hamill, who calls tabloid journalism "the first draft of social history."

"Newsday," says Daily News columnist Juan Gonzalez, "has put a whole new factor into the equation." Instead of "Zingo"—the circulation-building game the News came up with in a fit of

### 'He returned to the bar, fatally shot the two brothers, and then strolled down the block and had a fish dinner'

Denis Hamill New York Newsday

creativity after Murdoch's Post invented "Wingo" a few years back-New York tabloid competition now seems to be about "going after people who care about the city and who want real news." says Tom Robbins, an investigative reporter recently hired by the Daily News from the The Village Voice. Newsday puts a fair amount of emphasis on the sort of issues that tabloids are not famous for covering, such as housing and education, and it is making steady progress. Back when the paper's circulation was around 120,000, News editor Gil Spencer was reported to have said that he lost that many papers off his trucks each day; if that's the case now that Newsday is around 175,000, he might check the fleet's shock absorbers.

In recent months, *Newsday* specials have included a scary four-part series on the bootleg weapons trade in New York, a three-part investigation into the city's chaotic and outmoded elections system, and a fourteen-part look at the "Trials & Triumphs" of blacks in New York.

But the *Daily News* has been energetic too, breaking the Wedtech corruption scandal, which has resulted in the conviction of one New York congressman and the indictment of another, and investigating allegations that state comptroller Edward Regan had been trading state business for campaign contributions. The paper ran an excellent four-

part series on the Holland welfare hotel, describing it as a place where the poor live in misery, drug dealers thrive, and the owners milk the city.

Newsday's competition is not the only change in chemistry at the News, which for a while seemed likely to be crushed to death between its owner, the Chicagobased Tribune Company, and its unions, but which emerged from the ordeal in fighting shape. "We were already moving in the area of more projects, more emphasis on life in the city," says Arthur Browne, metro editor at the News. "We were saying, 'Let's get away just a little bit from running for every crime, every fire, every ambulance siren.' Then Newsday came along with this reputation as a very thinky paper, and you look at them and say, 'What lessons are to be learned from this?' There is no question in my mind that the level of journalism in New York City has risen, and that there are more interesting voices in the city than there were."

ore interesting voices. Here is Gail Collins in the October 12 Daily News, after watching Kitty Dukakis handle a small snafu on the campaign trail:

Kitty Dukakis just keeps smiling.

"Is there, um, a time frame here?" she asks no one in particular.

Dukakis has developed a method of talking while smiling for the cameras. It looks a little peculiar—as though she were constantly baring her teeth. But valuable seconds are being saved!

Here is Denis Hamill, Pete's brother, in the November 2 *Newsday*, on the denouement of a discussion between two Irish immigrants, James and Patrick Folan, and a Hungarian immigrant named Andreas Doczy, "about the merits of their respective 'old countries'":

The three of them wound up on the sidewalk outside. Doczy received a broken nose. He left and went home to College Point where he pocketed an illegal .32-cal. handgun. He returned to the bar, fatally shot the two brothers, and then strolled down the block and had a fish dinner in a Greek restaurant.

New York, the League of Nations.

And in the October 11 Post, here's Jerry Nachman in the middle of the Mets/Dodgers National League Cham-

pionship Series, explaining New York's ancient anti-Dodger venom:

Every bad thing in our lives dates from the cowardly decision to pull the Dodgers out of Brooklyn. No one can remember anything bad ever happening before the end of the 1957 baseball season.

There was a tiny but wonderful amusement park at the corner of Flatbush and Caton Avs. And the Prospect Park Zoo had animals to stare at, not pity. And there was a working and vibrant movie house on every other block from the Park to Brooklyn College. And men got off the subways with their sons and the kids ate pistachio-flavored soft ice cream and walked over to Ebbets Field. . . .

As far as I'm concerned, the escalating battle of the columnists is the best part of the great New York newspaper war. When their writing is strong, and it usually is, they can give you your bearings in the news-and-information fog that smothers the city, even when you disagree with them. They are fiercely populist, most of them, quick to comfort the afflicted. And afflict the comfortable: Jimmy Breslin and Robert Reno even debated on October 13 and 14 in Newsday about just why it is that real estate

'They could be as insufferable as Donald Trump and who would care? They could eat off their knives . . . '

> Robert Reno New York Newsday

entrepreneur Donald Trump is so awful. Breslin took a look at a studio apartment in Trump Parc, on Central Park South, which was going for \$325,000 although "the Trump full-page ad for his building was bigger than the apartment."

I walked from the Trump Parc to Fifth Avenue and then passed the Trump Tower, this brown glass building whose cheap architecture bawls one word into the sky over a once beautiful avenue: greed.

Yet the man whose name is on it, Donald Trump, can stand and say that it is one of the wonders of the eye and everybody in this city of rich sheep cries out that, most certainly, the Trump Tower is true grandeur.

Reno, in his lively and wide-ranging

economics column in the business section, contended that the problem with Trump is not bad taste or morals, but that he represents the failure of the Reagan economy:

Trump, naturally, imagines that it takes great and singular genius to make a killing in midtown Manhattan real estate when that market is in its cyclical upswing or to buy a gambling hall and make a profit from games in which the customers, by law, always lose in the aggregate. What's discouraging is that the Reagan era has not produced more billionaires capable of building factories that can compete with the Japanese, businesses that would create thousands of high-paying. permanent productive jobs instead of new positions for yacht stewards. If it had, they could be as insufferable as Donald Trump and who would care? They could eat off their knives, throw food at parties. . .

Newsday's formidable phalanx of columnists includes three Pulitzer Prizewinners - Breslin, Sydney H. Schanberg, who moved his op-ed city affairs column over from the Times in 1986, and the venerable Murray Kempton, who spins out his elegant thoughts an incredible four days a week. ("Oh well, I shall vote for him," Kempton wrote about Michael Dukakis on October 21. "and am consoled for that cheerless duty by the powerful suspicion that the heart saddened by the news that he won't be president would not be especially uplifted if he were.") The paper installed James A. Revson, a son of the co-founder of Revlon Inc., as a watchdog of the charity-ball set in a twiceweekly "Social Studies" column. There he accused Aileen Mehle-known as "Suzy" in her Daily News gossip column - of listing guests at a high-society party she never attended, a flap known briefly last spring as "Suzygate."

n another smart move, Newsday established an "In the Subways" column; writer Jim Dwyer has brought this world, in which 3.5 million New Yorkers spend part of each workday, to life, and his encyclopedic knowledge of the system keeps him a car's length ahead of everybody. On October 13, after a water main burst and shut down subway service on the west side of Manhattan, Dwyer found out that three brand-new pump cars, bought for \$650,000 apiece to deal with just such

a problem, had failed to operate. Then he backed up and described how an engineering decision made around the turn of the century by a man named William Parsons was responsible for the flooding — all of this in some 800 neatly turned words that concluded this way:

The water lapped over the tracks and onto the platforms, giving the flooded stations the look of Venetian canals.

The trouble was confined to "the 1,2,3,A,C,K,D,E, and F [lines]," reported [Transit Authority] President David Gunn. "Other than that, everything was fine."

Breslin's farewell to the *News* was a single line at the end of his May 22 column: "Thank you for the use of the hall." By the time he started up in his new space at *Newsday*, the *News*'s "new generation of voices" was adding a new

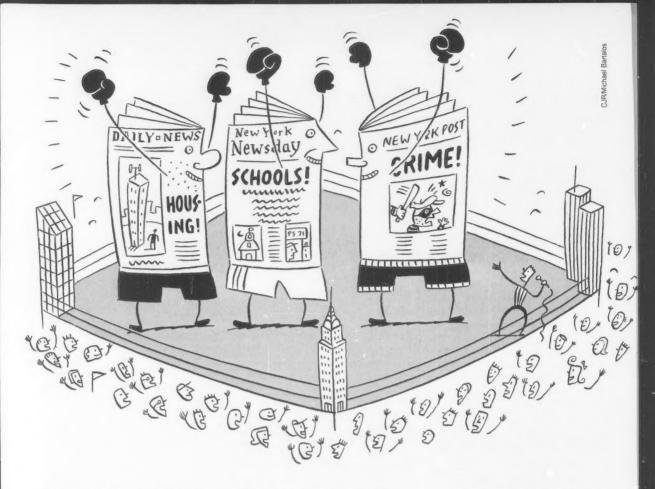
'Maybe Baker can appoint an ambassador to Harlem and the South Bronx, who will tell the next president what's going on in these remote regions'

> Bob Herbert Daily News

dimension to New York journalism. Among all the major front-of-the-paper news columnists in the city, Gail Collins is the only woman, Juan Gonzalez the only Hispanic, and Bob Herbert the only black. (Mike McAlary, the fourth part of the *News*'s "new generation," is a member of the best-represented ethnic group among New York's tabloid columnists, the Irish.) Some 42 percent of the *News*'s readers are black and some 28 percent are Hispanic. "There's finally a recognition that the paper has got to address a whole new constituency of readers," says Gonzalez.

The News's new generation can bring a special resonance to certain issues. Here's Herbert, for example, on the political geography after the '88 campaign, in a column that started off about an arson fire that killed a three-year-old boy:

There was no danger of any politicians showing up because this was 125th St. and



St. Nicholas Ave. in Harlem and the politicians seek their votes elsewhere. Even Dukakis, whose people complained loudly about racism in the Bush campaign, had to be dragged kicking and screaming into Harlem for the briefest of appearances.

Now we hear that Bush has nominated his campaign manager, James Baker, to be secretary of state — the man in charge of the country's diplomats. Maybe Baker can appoint an ambassador to Harlem and the South Bronx, somebody who will tell the next president what is going on in these remote regions.

On the other hand, none of these four columnists seems boxed in by category, and to my mind they give *Newsday* a serious run for the money. McAlary and Herbert are excellent reporters as well as strong writers; Collins wields a delicious wit; Gonzalez, although he swings from the heels and misses sometimes, can hit the long ball. On the day I spoke with him Gonzalez had just learned that his October 11 column had helped one

Gary Nieves, a Puerto Rican meat-company worker in desperate need of a liver transplant. When Gonzalez discovered him, Nieves was being shuttled between bureaucracies in New Jersey, none of which seemed eager to pay for his operation, while his weight dropped from 165 to 128.

Gonzalez's column triggered action from both New Jersey senators and the local Medicaid office suddenly found a shortcut through the red-tape jungle. (Unfortunately, Nieves died while awaiting the liver transplant.)

None of these writers is always good, of course. It would be okay with me if Pete Hamill would stop analyzing the character deficiencies of baseball pitchers just after they lose crucial playoff games. McAlary could get along fine without describing his victory in a bar brawl, as he did on an apparently desperate Sunday in mid-October. Even Breslin one day gave us an argument with his wife, made interesting only be-

cause it was about the price of a pair of shoes that cost "more than the people I write about live on for most of a year." Breslin is reportedly earning more than 400,000 Times Mirror Co. dollars, adding an interesting tension to his underdog instincts. But writing three times a week is hard enough; hitting the ball out of the park with such regularity is something else again.

ne way to get a fix on New York's tabloids is to watch them scramble onto a big breaking story, and the biggest one in New York this autumn came on the night of October 18. At a few minutes after seven that evening, Chris Hoban, a twenty-six-year-old undercover policeman, was shot and killed during a buy-and-bust operation in an upper Manhattan drug den. About three hours later and fifty-six blocks to the north a second cop, twenty-four-year-old Michael Buczek, was killed by a man with a semiauto-

matic weapon, after Buczek had ordered him to halt. Since it was widely suspected that Buczek's killer was connected to the heavy drug trade in the area, the two incidents marked a grim historical milestone for New York in its losing battle with narcotics.

Only the News seemed to sense this in time for the next day's paper. Everybody played it on page one, but the Post devoted the bottom of its front page to yet another dubious Mike Tyson story-IRON MIKE EXCLUSIVE: THE GIRL I WISH I'D MARRIED. Newsday even had a baseball score among the three stories it hyped along the bottom of the page, under a graphic of a police shoulder patch that could have illustrated a story about any police matter. The News got it right from the start, an all-black front page with the head written in white: 2 COPS SHOT DEAD, and underneath, 3 MILES & 3 HOURS APART.

The contrast in editorials on the day after the deaths is also telling. The Post, where Murdoch's man Eric Breindel still rules the edit page, pushed the death penalty and listed all the members of the state legislature who had voted against it during 1988. (Breindel's column that day, an anti-Dukakis piece unrelated to the police murders, featured a bracing dip into red-baiting.) The News didn't have much of a thought beyond anger on the first day after the shootings, but the day after that it would argue - in an editorial titled TWO DEAD COPS AND A PAPER WAR — that drug interdiction at our borders isn't working and that the real battle ought to be "making people stop using the stuff. That means education. That means treatment. All of that means spending some money." Newsday urged governor Mario Cuomo to convene a drug summit conference of all the city, state, and federal officials involved with the war on drugs, to draft a coordinated plan, and to appoint a citywide drug czar to run it.

On the 20th, as it turned out, in the wake of this tragedy, candidate George Bush, the federal drug czar at the time, came to town. And more than any other print or electronic media that I am aware of, New York's tabloids recognized the moment for its flash of insight into the schizoid crime-and-drugs debate of the bitter presidential campaign. Senator Alfonse D'Amato introduced the vice-pres-

ident as "George Bush, who supports the death penalty." The vice-president, standing in a sea of blue at Christ the King High School in Middle Village in Queens, accepted the endorsement of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association and basked in what was essentially a death-penalty rally, complete with high school cheerleaders who, as the *News*'s Lars-Erik Nelson noted, "cheered themselves hoarse at every mention of death."

And Bush accepted something else, the police badge of another dead cop, a rookie named Edward Byrne, who had been shot in the head point-blank in February as he sat on guard duty in a patrol car outside the home of a Queens drugcase witness. Byrne's father, Matthew, laid out a heartfelt case for capital punishment, based on the yearning for justice and revenge: "When a police officer or a law-abiding citizen is killed by someone in this state or in this land, the

## 'Noriega is still in power. Young men named Hoban and Buczek have joined the giant mound of the dead'

Pete Hamill New York Post

criminal has inflicted his private death penalty on us," Byrne said. "When some mutt decides to murder a cop or a civilian the victim does not get assigned counsel, the victim does not get a judge, a jury, or a trial. And the victim certainly does not get an appeal; there is no appeal from the barrel of an assassin's gun."

While the tabloids' news columns told that story, columnists at all three papers brought up some other associations with the words "Bush" and "drugs" and "crime" that did not get mentioned at Christ the King.

Breslin, the new columnist at *Newsday*, wondered whether the candidate would tell the families of the dead officers

how he could have a drug supplier on a government payroll. As nobody in this city would ask this of him without fainting, Bush will address high school students and then appear at night at the Al Smith political dinner, where there is no recall of Bush's role in drugs, and all will stand and drip tears for the two dead cops and then sit down and eat roast beef.

McAlary, the new columnist at the News, wrote:

More than a dozen New York City cops have been killed by drug dealers while Bush watched our borders, rushing from one place to the next to incite frightened people into voting for the death penalty. We are asked to forget that part and believe that Dan Quayle. . .will keep drugs from our cities. But the idea of Dan Quayle, drug czar, should not give cops a whole lot of confidence. Quayle, after all, has always left 'he business of warring to the other men.

Pete Hamill, the new columnist at the *New York Post*, noted that Quayle's "major handler," Stuart Spencer, took \$350,000 from Manuel Noriega during 1985 and 1986 for public relations work, an attempt to polish the Panamanian strongman's image. Noriega had needed such a polishing, Hamill noted, because an opposition leader, Dr. Hugo Spadafora, had brought evidence to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration indicating that Noriega was running drugs, and in September 1985, Spadafora had been murdered. Hamill quoted from an account of his death:

. . . his testicles were crushed, a pole was forced up his rectum, the insignia F-8—the calling card of one of the Panamanian Defense Force's death squads—was carved into his back. . . .

Noriega is still in power. Young men named Hoban and Buczek have joined the giant mound of the dead. . . .

I expect this Bush visit was handled differently on MacNeil/Lehrer. I don't know, because when you are reading a couple of solid tabloids a day something has to go. But I doubt that viewers had to feel the heat of Matthew Byrne's rage or ponder Dr. Spadafora's final moments. If past form is any guide, I expect the hosts invited a couple of surrogates for the candidates to block and check each other's moves, maybe a drug or death-penalty expert from the world of academia or law. Then, Goodnight Robin. Goodnight Jim. Get some rest. Robin was looking a little wan last time I checked in. He should take two tabloids and call in the morning.

### When death is the end of the story Don Drake, a medical writer at The

Reporters describe the troubling problems they face in covering the mortally ill

by LAURIE GARRETT

By the time Archie Harrison, age thirty-three, died on August 8, 1988, millions of Americans had been caught up in the drama of his thirty-month battle with the AIDS virus. For nearly two years his struggle had been chronicled by National Public Radio reporter Patricia Neighmond, who, for the most part, allowed Harrison to describe in his own words his fears, the pain he felt, the treatments he received, his constantly changing philosophical views, and, finally, how

he was preparing for his own death.

Archie Harrison was only one of many AIDS patients who, since the start of the AIDS epidemic, have agreed to share with journalists their most private thoughts and feelings in order to educate the American public about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Another was Dick Hanson, of Glenwood, Minnesota, whose final months were described in a three-part series, "AIDS in the Heartland," that appeared in the St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch in the summer of 1987. Reporter Jacqui Banaszynski received a Pulitzer Prize in the feature writing category for the series.

Philadelphia Inquirer, is generally acknowledged as the grand master of this kind of journalism, having for the past twenty years written pieces that seek to tell the story of a particular disease or of a new type of medical treatment by following the lives of patients, often for months on end. He calls this "prospective reporting," as opposed to the traditional sort, which he refers to as retrospective. Most of the time, Drake explains, the journalist arrives at the scene where something important has already happened; he asks various sources to describe what happened and the sources, wittingly or unwittingly, act as editors, telling some things, omitting others. "But when you do things prospectively," Drake says, "you're there all the time, you see it all. Your sources can't do the editing, so you have to do it for them."

The relationship that develops between reporter and source is unusually close. The reporter becomes a special friend, a confidant. "You tell them, 'Hey, I'm a reporter,' " Drake says, "but everything is designed to make them forget you are a reporter. It creates a very interesting situation because implicit in your relationship with the source is trust. It's a sort of unverbalized social contract." Drake says he thinks prospective reporting almost inevitably sets up an internal conflict "between your ethics as a journalist and your principles as a human being." The older he gets, he adds, the more importance he assigns to the feelings of the people he writes

Lisa Krieger of the San Francisco Examiner, who has written a number of prospective stories, became acutely aware of the conflict Drake describes when, two years ago, she reported on a young AIDS sufferer who was about to undergo AZT therapy. Because she filed her story the same day AZT was legalized, it went into front-page syndication in papers throughout the country, including the paper in the small town in which her source's family lived.

"And they didn't know he was dying," Krieger says. "So his parents

Laurie Garrett was science correspondent for National Public Radio for eight years; she is now medical writer for Newsday.



A special relationship: Jacqui Banaszynski won a Pulitzer Prize for writing about AIDS patient Dick Hanson (left) and his lover, Bert Henningson. Both men are now dead.

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

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found out from my article." By this time the source was passing in and out of AIDS-induced domentia and he and his lover threatened to sue Krieger. Krieger, who had come to feel close to her source, says she was left with the sense that she had betrayed him "because I didn't think about the repercussions there might be on his life if the story ran outside the San Francisco area. I just wasn't thinking about it." Now, she says, she thinks about the effects her reporting may have on her sources all the time when doing a prospective story.

ormer San Francisco television reporter Jim Bunn was the first journalist to follow an AIDS patient's struggle with the disease over an extended period of time on television. Now working as a free-lance television producer, Bunn defines himself as "a human being who practices journalism, in that order." As early as 1983 he was airing portraits of AIDS sufferers in the San Francisco area. He quickly learned, he says, that "there is a very, very big difference between an AIDS patient consenting to do an interview on television and sitting there watching himself on TV and hearing the reporter he just talked to explain in journalistic terms that he's going to die. It has a sense of finality to it that cuts through damned near every safety net a person has built for himself.'

Bunn tried to construct safety nets for the AIDS patients he interviewed by, among other things, holding lengthy discussions with his subjects in which they talked about death off-camera. Sometimes this mitigated the shock but sometimes, Bunn says, no matter how careful his preparations, hearing their own impending death talked about on television proved devastating to the sources.

One might well ask whether it is a journalist's job to prepare a source for listening to or viewing or reading his own story. Drake of the *Inquirer* believes that it is. He recalls an illuminating incident involving the mother of a child who had leukemia. For months Drake had stood by the mother's side, often holding her hand as the daughter underwent yet another painful treatment. One day when the child cried out in pain, the mother turned to Drake and said, "I wish she would die."

"Why?" Drake said. "Because she is in so much pain?"

"No. Because *I'm* in so much pain. I can't take it anymore."

Drake says he was immediately aware that this "devastating" quote posed problems. "I was in a dilemma," he says, "where there was this quote that was extremely damaging to a source who totally trusted me. But I thought it was incredibly important to the story."

That night, Drake says, he tried to work the quote into the story in various ways, his objective being to assure that the reader would not misread as unfeeling the words spoken in a moment of extreme anguish. The following day he read his best version to the mother and gave her an opportunity to object before including the quote in the story. "She said, 'If you feel it's important, then okay, use it.'"

Throughout the many months Patricia Neighmond of NPR spent on the story of Archie Harrison, she was, she says, constantly concerned about not going beyond "what's appropriate to tell the story" and getting into a journalism that verged on voyeurism. Neighmond still wonders if she made the correct decision on one aspect of her reporting. For the last year of his life Harrison had uncontrollable diarrhea and wore adult diapers. "Now that's dramatic," Neighmond says. "It says something about the horror of the illness. But it's also very embarrassing." She weighed the need to tell her audience what it needed to know about Harrison's illness against his right to live and die in dignity, and decided in favor of her source.

Don Drake says that years of prospective medical reporting have made him "terribly aware" of his own mortality: "I don't think a day goes by that I don't think of my own death. And a couple of times I've been so freaked out I've thought I was having a heart attack."

Marlene Cimons of the Los Angeles Times, who wrote an eight-part series describing the last twenty months in the life of AIDS patient Jeff Mullican, says that, toward the end, she unconsciously tried to distance herself from him. "Jeff was a very good person," Cimons recalls, "and I was really fond of him, but in the last six months of his life I found myself focusing on the things about him

I didn't like. I think I was doing that for self-protection. And then my daughter arrived in July, when he was entering his final crisis months, and I used her as an excuse to back off from him."

Cimons says that, despite her efforts to prepare herself for Mullican's death, it came as a shock and, she adds, "I had nightmares about him for months. I still do."

Several practitioners of prospective reporting say that the interviews, carried out over a long period of time, come to serve as a form of therapy for the subject. "They get to trust you so much," Drake says, "and they tell you everything." Neighmond says that Archie Harrison used her periodic interviews as an opportunity to clarify his own thoughts about AIDS and death. "I think the fact of my being there with a microphone set a serious tone for his thought processes," she says. "He would gather all his emotional and spiritual forces and focus during the interview. Even Drew [Harrison's lover] said after the last time we talked about dying, and Archie said he was scared, Drew said, 'Phew! That was therapy. He needed to do that. It was a purging.' "

Harrison shared with Neighmond thoughts he had not shared even with Drew, in part because, Neighmond explains, "friends don't go up and ask you how you feel about dying. Nobody forced Archie to confront how he was feeling about all these things except me."

Marlene Cimons recalls that her interviews with AIDS patient Mullican had a positive effect not only on the gay man himself but on his family. "They never got comfortable about his gayness," Cimons says, "but they said that the series was Jeff's legacy. And they came to support it because they saw what it was doing for him. They saw that I was his friend."

In the end, Cimons says, the family drew on her for their own therapeutic benefit. Jeff's father, who was never able to accept his son's homosexuality, refused Jeff's Thanksgiving Day request for a hug. A month later, at Jeff's funeral, Cimons says, "without a word, he just threw his arms around me and gave me a big hug and said thank you. And I think he was giving Jeff a hug through me. It bowled me over."

### **State of the union**

### The Newspaper Guild under the gun

by DANIEL LAZARE

ny assessment of The Newspaper Guild's performance in the late '80s inevitably calls up the old question of whether the glass is half full or half empty.

On the one hand, the chief labor union for reporters, copy editors, and other nonmechanical newspaper employees has not only survived the conservative '80s but is actually expanding. Whereas total union membership in the United States has declined 16 percent since 1980, the Guild's has risen 4 percent over the same period, despite the collapse of Guild newspapers in Cleveland, Buffalo, and Washington, D.C. Big-city Guild newspapers still set the industry standard for pay and benefits, and the union still has to struggle to keep up with the large volume of requests from nonunion employees for help in organizing. Although some editorial employees are apathetic about the Guild and ambivalent about joining in a union with keypunchers and clerks, at other papers loyalty and enthusiasm run high. "We've got a hundred and thirty-six members here, and we're solid," says Jane Snow, a food writer and local Guild president at the Akron Beacon Journal, where contract negotiations have turned bitter. "My whole problem is keeping these people from hitting the streets."

On the other hand, if the Guild is still expanding, total newspaper employment since 1980 is expanding more than three times as fast. And, if the union continues to set the general industry standard for wages and benefits, signs of erosion nonetheless abound. Meanwhile, the intensely antilabor climate continues to take its toll. Professor Paul Weiler of Harvard Law School, an expert in labor relations, notes that employer retaliation for union activities has reached such a point that by 1985, according to data issued by the National Labor Relations Board, a worker faced a roughly 10 per-

cent chance of being fired merely for voting for union representation in a federally sanctioned union-certification election. For the Guild, the bottom line is that while interest may be high, the obstacles to expansion are more daunting than ever.

One obstacle is that, for reasons that will become apparent, the union's chief weapon - the strike - has been blunted, and the Guild has had to rely on ancillary techniques such as byline strikes, antidiscrimination suits, and NLRB charges that leave publishers feeling embarrassed and harassed but little more. A recent byline strike at The Washington Post demonstrated "that there is virtual unanimity in our distaste for what management is doing" in refusing to negotiate with the Guild, one metro reporter observes. "But on a subtler level, it also demonstrated our impotence because it was the most we could do."

"My [union] dues are seventeen dollars a week," another Washington Post reporter says, "and the way I see it is that if I'm paying that kind of money, I would like to see some results. And I don't see any. It's nine hundred dollars a year down the drain."

The frustration is also evident at the

Guild's new headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, where Charles Dale, the union's stocky, Nova Scotia-born president, inveighs against militant publishers and "terrorist" lawyers who advise owners how to impede organizing drives and break unions. "Sure we've got problems," he said in a recent interview, "and those problems are almost a direct reflection of the business climate in this country. Corporate greed is what we're confronting. We're fighting much harder because the companies are making it more difficult for us." Guild crisis zones include north-central California, where the union is fighting for survival against the McClatchy chain in Sacramento, Fresno, and Modesto; Tacoma, Washington, where publisher C.K. McClatchy cancelled all union contracts when he purchased The Morning News Tribune two years ago; Dayton, Ohio, where the Daily News, a Cox newspaper, has refused to sign a contract with an independent employees' association that voted to affiliate with the Guild; and The Washington Post, where the Guild is still struggling to come out from under the shadow of a disastrous 1975 pressmen's strike.

In other words, the Guild is "leaner and meaner" these days, as Jane Snow

Fighting words: Guild president Charles Dale, who claims "terrorist" lawyers are teaching publishers how to bust unions, says, "Corporate greed is what we're confronting."



Daniel Lazare, who headed a small Guild unit in New Jersey in the 1970s, is New York correspondent for In These Times. put it in Akron, but publishers are even meaner. The union is embattled in a way that it hasn't been for years, but whether it will emerge from the shakeout in a stronger or weaker position is anybody's guess.

rouble in the newspaper business has been brewing for years. Change, economic and technological, has been sweeping. A quarter of a century ago, pressmen still hoisted slabs of lead type onto huge rollers; today, the entire process, from writing to printing, has been computerized. Meanwhile, although the newspaper industry, unlike auto and steel, would appear immune to foreign competition, long-established big-city dailies are vulnerable to competition from low-wage, high-growth newspaper chains in the suburbs.

For the Guild, the industry's rapid suburbanization is troubling because these newspapers are small, scattered, often far from the traditional centers of union influence, and therefore hard to organize. Then there is the perennial problem of journalists themselves, still the core of the Guild's membership, who often think of themselves as more professional than proletarian. Their salaries may be blue-collar - just \$256 a week for beginning reporters at small newspapers, according to a 1986 survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors — but their working conditions are not. Their work is creative, their clothes are clean, and they are on a firstname basis with prominent politicians. A Guild organizer singing the refrain to the old Harlan County coal miners' anthem ("Which side are you on, boys, which side are you on . . . ") is likely to be met with blank stares by journalists who do not immediately think of their situation in terms of class strug-

Equally important has been the change in management style. A generation ago, newspaper businesses were often family affairs, run by publishers with a sense of noblesse oblige toward the public and the workforce. Their conduct was often despotic, but eventually they were able to reach a modus vivendi with their unions providing for modest but regular advances in wages and benefits. Today, the style is more professional, less sentimental, and notably

more ruthless. "Newspapers are now being squeezed by stockholders who don't particularly care about the newspaper business and just want good dividends," says Professor Robert Picard, director of the communication industries management program at Emerson College in Boston. "It's like the difference between normal and pure profits in economics, between making a buck to stay in business and being in business to make a buck. Formerly, you wanted to make money, but as long as the bills were paid, everyone was happy. But now that's not enough."

Looking back, most observers agree that the watershed year in newspaper labor relations was 1975, when *The Washington Post* broke a strike by pressmen by bringing in helicopters to fly printing plates to distant production facilities and by distributing photos of sabotaged presses, convincing a majority of Guild members to cross the picket line and return to work.

Three years later, hundreds of whiteand blue-collar workers blocked the narrow street behind the Daily News building in New York when the paper tried to publish during a strike by the Guild. In a scene out of the '30s, the employees threw stones and clashed with police. Yet while they forced the paper to cease operating, the strikers also succeeded in highlighting the crucial role now played by the newspaper deliverers' union. With the various craft unions weakened by automation and computerization, the drivers were the last union with an effective hammerlock on production. The Guild had the numbers, but the drivers held the cards.

### The Washington Post: the long road back

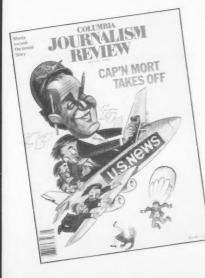
Although the 1975 pressmen's strike was a turning point, labor relations at *The Washington Post* had begun to turn rough several years earlier. In 1971, publisher Katharine Graham took the company public and declared war on "archaic union practices" as part of a strategy to bolster profits and stave off competition from the now-defunct *Washington Star*. Two years later the printers struck, successfully defying the new *Post* management by sitting in at the plant to prevent the hiring of strike-breakers. In 1974, Guild members called



Suing the bosses: Sandi Polaski of the Baltimore/Washington Guild has filed discrimination complaints against The Washington Post to win what the Guild couldn't get at the bargaining table.

a strike, a decorous affair in which reporters and others walked out - withholding their professional "excellence," as they put it - but refrained from picketing. Then came the pressmen's strike and a mass revolt by Guild members at the Post when the larger Washington-Baltimore local (which includes the Baltimore Sun and more than a dozen smaller units) voted to honor the picket line. Guild officials were convinced that if the pressmen were broken at the Post, other unions would be left vulnerable and exposed. Yet while a minority of Guild members stayed out in support of the pressmen and a few, bitter over the behavior of their fellow employees, refused to return even after the strike was over, ordinary Guild members no longer seemed to care. They would not take part in a fight, they said, in which they no longer believed.

Since then, the *Post* has been every Guild activist's worst-case scenario. In 1977, the Guild survived a decertification election; two years later, it was forced to agree to a lower pay scale for new employees. Contract negotiations, meanwhile, dragged on in a decidedly lopsided fashion, with the Guild able to



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offer little more than token resistance. In 1986, however, Sandi Polaski, the new local administrative officer and a veteran of the left-leaning United Electrical Workers, came up with a legal strategy to break the cycle of defeat. The Guild financed a suit in federal court against the Post's policy of routinely denying overtime pay to reporters and lodged a complaint with the city's Office of Human Rights charging that the paper's new merit-pay system discriminated against women, minorities, and older workers. What The Newspaper Guild couldn't accomplish at the bargaining table on the discrimination issue, Polaski hoped to achieve through the courts.

The results have been less than spectacular. Ambitious young reporters who routinely work long hours and rarely ask for extra pay were taken aback when a Guild attorney argued before District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell that, for purposes of federal overtime law, reporters were hourly workers, not professionals. "I just don't consider myself a clock puncher," says one Post reporter. "I thought we looked ridiculous arguing in there that we are not professionals, when we obviously are." The discrimination complaint gave at least some reporters pause when they realized it would place the newspaper under the scrutiny of a city agency controlled by Mayor Marion Barry, the subject of repeated Post investigations into municipal corruption. By filing the complaint, the Guild seemed to be inviting the Barry administration to rummage through the Post's most sensitive employment practices, a prospect that left many reporters aghast.

"I think the Guild is pursuing a lastditch strategy," observes another reporter, who, like most Post employees, requested anonymity. "After having had the shit kicked out of us over all the really important issues, they've fallen back on embarrassing the Post." Far from discriminating, the Post has shown "an absolute preoccupation with hiring and promoting minorities," he adds. "What I believe we have here is a meritocracy with strong but judicious affirmative action considerations. I'm not saying this place is perfect, but I don't see any strong pattern of [discriminatory] acts."

Polaski counters that Post management, by refusing to discuss discrimination at the bargaining table, left the Guild with no choice but to file a legal complaint. The union went before a city agency, she says, because District of Columbia law is more favorable to a classaction complaint than the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under President Reagan. As for whether inequities even exist, Polaski and other Guild activists say the complaint is not a ploy to harass the newspaper, but a serious charge that will withstand legal scrutiny. "We've done regression analysis on salary figures for recent years," Polaski says, "and after eliminating age and length of service with the Post, you still come up with enormous disparities on the basis of race and sex." She noted that a 1986 management survey of more than 400 editorial employees found that, by a margin of eight to one, women and blacks believed that white men enjoyed greater opportunities for advancement. The Guild complaint also charges that older employees in the Post's highly competitive newsroom receive smaller raises, are often shifted to less desirable positions, and are sometimes coerced into leaving.

he Post has broken off talks on a three-year contract that was supposed to have gone into effect in 1986 and has ceased automatically deducting union dues from the paychecks of new Guild members. The Guild protested the move before the National Labor Relations Board, and reporters followed up with a two-day byline strike in July 1988 to protest the lack of a contract. Meanwhile, life at the Post has changed substantially now that the unions have been thrown on the defensive. While reporter salaries average around \$59,000 per year, comparable to those of The New York Times, the range among individual employees has widened, with some young reporters making less than \$500 a week. Outside the newsroom, wages and working conditions have deteriorated sharply, according to the Guild, with clerical workers who take classified ads and subscription orders complaining that supervisors eavesdrop on their telephone conversations and monitor their performance for keystrokes per minute and phone calls fielded per hour. In 1986, the Guild printed excerpts from a confidential memo at the *Post* which declared that "the purpose of corrective discipline is to demean the employee in his eyes, in the eyes of his family, and the eyes of his fellow employees" and advised extra-heavy punishment "if a union official abuses his leadership responsibilities." (A *Post* official denies that supervisors eavesdrop on phone calls and says that the memo, although written by the former vice-president for industrial relations, does not represent company policy.)

Some 60 percent of the eligible employees at the open-shop Washington Post still pay dues to the Guild even though, with the craft unions weak and the newspaper deliverers mostly nonunion, its clout at the bargaining table would seem to be vastly reduced. "Sometimes we get real mad at management and then real disappointed with the Guild," says a Post reporter. "We say we ought to do something to rejuvenate the Guild, but then we think, what? And it sputters out."

### The New York Times: peace in our time

Rejuvenation was very much on the mind of Guild activists in New York in the late '70s and early '80s, although the movement there eventually sputtered out as well. In 1978, Betsy Wade, then assistant travel editor at The New York Times, assembled a slate of reform candidates from the Times, the Daily News, the New York Post, Time, Newsweek, and other publications and set out to capture control of the 5,000-member New York local, the Guild's largest. Dissatisfied with what they saw as the New York Guild's lackluster leadership, members voted the slate into office. Yet the real battle had just begun. Whereas the Wade forces accused the local's halfdozen organizers of incompetence and laziness, the staff, firing back from amid the rubble, denounced the insurgents as spoilers, radicals, even communists. Polemics were exchanged, and there was an outbreak of pushing and shoving at a meeting at the local's headquarters off Times Square.

But then, after three years, the tide began to recede. Wade's allies at the Daily News defected to the other side for fear that hotheads at the Post and the Times were trying to provoke a citywide strike that would kill off their newspaper. In 1982, the insurgents were swept out of the leadership of the local, although Wade's forces continued to cling to power in their stronghold at the Times. In 1984, the remnants of the Membership Slate, as it was known, urged Guild members at the Times to reject an agreement, pushed by the New York local, that would surrender Guild jurisdiction over some 175 professional and semisupervisory positions. Nevertheless, Guild members approved it overwhelmingly. The same year, Wade's allies at the Times recommended voting down a proposed three-year contract extension, but members approved that one as well. Finally, the leadership at the Times proposed a plan to divert part of a wage increase to pay for increased health insurance costs; again, members rejected the advice and voted the other way.

The members had spoken, not just on the three questions before them but on the long period of political infighting, which had largely passed over their heads. "It was all so confusing; I could never figure out what it was all about," confesses one reporter on the metro staff. Don Bacheller, a Times copy editor and a leading figure among the insurgents, observes, "We were two vociferous, maniacal factions fighting it out over stuff that was increasingly arcane to the membership. It was clear by nineteen eighty-four that the membership was leaning away from the combative, mass-participation approach that we advocated and leaning toward a business-as-usual approach and leaving things to the professionals."

Today, an almost unnatural peace

seems to have descended on the *Times*. After approving the three-year contract extension in 1984, the paper's unions then agreed to virtually unprecedented six-year contracts that would ensure labor peace through the early '90s. Profits have increased more than 20 percent per year through the '80s, yet yearly wage increases are now running at around 4 percent, at or below the likely rate of inflation. Health insurance costs, at the same time, continued to rise.

onetheless, Guild members voted to take the money and run. With the craft unions preoccupied with job security, almost no one was willing to risk another grueling eighty-eight-day strike, like the one in 1978, over the loss of a few percentage points in buying power or an erosion in health benefits. With no solution in

### Stringing along in Philadelphia

ike a lot of major metropolitan newspapers, *The Philadephia Inquirer* is trying to push further into the suburbs, where for the past few years it has been locked in a fierce circulation and advertising battle with the weeklies and dailies that surround it. As at a lot of papers, the *Inquirer*'s foot soldiers in this battle include full- and part-time stringers, whose work largely fills eight regional "Neighbors" sections.

And, like stringers in similar operations around the country, many at the Inquirer are unhappy with their pay, benefits, and advancement opportunities (see "Journalism's New Underclass?" CJR, March/April 1987). For a while, the Guild unit in Philadelphia seemed to see these stringers mostly as a threat, a growing group of low-wage workers who could undercut unionized reporters and photographers at the main paper. Now it has come to view them as potential full-fledged union members. But that change didn't come about until the stringers took matters into their own hands and began to organize themselves,

the first such drive at a major paper. Their bitter struggle with the *Inquirer* is still far from finished.

The Guild's Local 10 began taking stringers into account some five years ago, and in 1985 contract negotiations it signed a "letter of understanding" with the *Inquirer* that won some minimal health benefits for full-time stringers but, on the other hand, limited the reporting they could do in Philadephia and in Camden, just across the Delaware river in New Jersey. The letter also limited the ratio of full-time stringers to staff reporters on the "Neighbors" sections and included a provision that after three years full-time stringers had to be put on staff or let go.

Guild officials now say they saw that three-year limit as a way to get some of the stringers taken on permanently, but many of the stringers felt certain they would be tossed out at the end of three years and replaced with new people from the vast pool of inexperienced reporters eager to work for a major newspaper. In November 1987 a handful of full-time stringers began meeting about this and sharing other common complaints — stories taken away and given to their regular-staff colleagues in the bureaus; the lack of an objective review system; the

by JOSEPH A. CINCOTTI

lack of overtime, sufficient benefits, and job security.

In January, ten of the Inquirer's fulltime stringers petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for the right to form their own union, to be called The Newspaper Reporters of the Philadelphia Inquirer, District 1. They bypassed the Guild because they suspected it had used them as bargaining chips in 1985, giving up any real attempt to help them in return for concessions from management. The union, in fact, had included an unusual clause in the letter of understanding, in which it agreed not to initiate any organizing drive among stringers during the term of the contract, which runs until August 1989. "What they did was bargain us away," says Theresa A. Conroy, District 1's former secretary-treasurer and now an assistant editor at Philadelphia Magazine. "They used people of flesh and blood to get what they wanted. I'm not confident they wouldn't do it

The NLRB held eight days of hearings on District 1's petition. The *Inquirer*, represented by a partner in the 125-law-yer firm of Dilworth, Paxson, Kalish & Kauffman, contended that the full-time stringers were not actually employees but independent contractors, paid a set

Joseph A. Cincotti writes regularly for The New York Times, where he is a news assistant.

sight, the loss seemed well within tolerable limits. Meanwhile, the Guild continued to fade as a newsroom presence. "I've been here thirty-four years, and I don't think the Guild has come up more than a handful of times in conversation in recent years," says Richard Witkin, the Times's aviation editor and a Guild member since the 1940s. "I'm embarrassed in a way because I feel so strongly about labor unions," a reporter says, "but this union is without power and without a constituency, and it's the fault of people like me." A third journalist says flatly, "The Guild plays almost no role at the Times."

While many younger journalists dismiss the Guild as a self-serving club for the professionally washed-up and overthe-hill, battle-scarred veterans speak scornfully of "newsroom yuppies" who, as one of their critics put it, "don't know how to spell 'Guild,' don't know what it means, and think they can do without it."

### The Milwaukee Journal: back in action

The story has been different at The Milwaukee Journal, a non-Guild newspaper that withstood organizing efforts in the '30s and '40s, and at the smaller Milwaukee Sentinel, where the Guild succeeded in gaining a foothold, only to be thrown out after an abortive strike in 1962. Despite occasional rumblings of discontent, the news staffs at both papers remained non-union until recession hit the Midwest in the early '80s, resulting in a series of deeply resented economy measures. Wages were frozen and then portions of an anticipated wage increase were deferred. Employee costs for health insurance rose, while, according to the union, the use of low-paid parttime stringers, a source of friction at other Guild papers, continued to expand (see sidebar). In 1983, employees at the city's two papers began meeting to mull over the possibility of unionization; by the end of the year an organizing drive was on. On March 1, 1984, the Guild petitioned the NLRB for a certification election, which, three months later, it won by a margin of six to five. "I think they [management] were caught by surprise by the quickness of the organizing drive," says Michael Kuchta, a copy editor at the Journal who is now president of the newly reconstituted Milwaukee

If so, much of the credit goes to Jack Norman, a forty-three-year-old business reporter with an unusual background. A former assistant professor of philosophy at the Milwaukee campus of the Uni-

weekly wage. The paper also argued that the stringers are not up to staff caliber, that they handle mainly "entry-level" stories. This contention was somewhat undermined when two full-time stringers, competing with staff writers on the main paper, won second place in a fairly prestigious journalism contest. "Right," was *Inquirer* executive editor Gene Roberts's reply. "And amateur photographers have won the Pulitzer Prize. But that doesn't mean you'd rush out and hire them."

John Corcoran, a lawyer in solo practice, contended that full-time stringers are employees because, among other things, they use company equipment and do not have the right to refuse assignments.

In July, the NLRB surprised many when it decided that not only were full-time stringers *Inquirer* employees — and thus eligible for union membership — but so, too, were part-time stringers. The potential bargaining unit suddenly increased from seventeen to more than 200. At that point, District 1 reluctantly decided it needed the Guild. "We didn't have two pennies to rub together," Conroy says. "We needed manpower." As

part of its agreement with District 1, the Guild agreed to make pay-and-benefits parity for stringers its number one priority in 1989 bargaining. In exchange, District 1 agreed to urge all stringers to vote for the Guild. The partnership has never been smooth, however.

The election campaign was hard fought. The Inquirer sent out top editors - called the "sunshine boys" by District 1 activists — to meet personally with nearly every eligible stringer. Theresa Conroy says that Gary Farrugia, assistant to executive editor Roberts, spent \$67 and four hours at a Manayunk restaurant with her, during which she says he told her, among other things, that he'd seen union fights hurt people's careers, and that union-scale wages would threaten the "Neighbors" sections and cost a lot of jobs, for which Conroy might be held "personally responsible." Citing this and other incidents, District 1 filed an unfair labor practice charge against the Inquirer. Farrugia says the charge has been fabricated as part of a strategy to overturn the election, and the Inquirer says it did not step over any legal lines during the campaign.

The vote was inconclusive. Sixty-nine people voted to join the Guild as against sixty votes for no union. But seventy-

five votes were challenged, most of them by the union. So neither side received the required 50 percent plus one required for a victory. The NLRB's Philadelphia office may have untangled the results of the election by the time this article appears, but appeals are likely to keep the case active for months.

Among the opponents of the organizing effort is Ray Rinaldi, a member of a five-person group called Stringers Against the Union, who started out writing obits part time at the *Inquirer*. Now he covers New Jersey's Burlington County government full time. "I have a great beat, a fair wage, and I work with great editors," he says. "There is a system here that works for me."

Beth Gillin, an *Inquirer* reporter and the president of the Guild's Local 10, says that even if the Guild were to be declared the loser in the current election it will eventually represent the stringers. And David Baum, the Guild's chief organizer in Philadelphia, says the NLRB's ruling that the stringers are employees — a decision the *Inquirer* could challenge if the union is certified — opens a big door for the Guild. "Now we can go after thousands of people we couldn't go after before, who are no longer independent contractors."



Jack of all trades: Business reporter Jack Norman, exlongshoreman and exphilosophy teacher, led a successful drive to organize Milwaukee's two dailies.

versity of Wisconsin, Norman tired of the academic life after five years, dropped out, and went to work as a long-shoreman. Fascinated with economics, he drifted into journalism, putting out a local magazine, working for a labor paper in Racine County, and finally stringing for the business section of *The Milwaukee Journal*. In 1982 he joined the *Journal* full time. When a couple of colleagues invited him to a union meeting the next year, he accepted and soon found himself leading the drive.

"I just remember someone pointing his finger at me and my saying, 'All right, I'll do it,' " Norman recalls. The decision was not without risk, he acknowledges. "But I had worked as a Kelly Girl when I was thirty-five years old and had a Ph.D. I had driven trucks and delivered caskets to funeral homes in Chicago. I just figured there were plenty of ways to survive." Bruce Nelson, the Guild representative in St. Paul, Minnesota, says the Milwaukee campaign succeeded because it was led by "a very unusual group, people who were well respected, who were not in it for themselves but because they perceived inequities." In 1984, Norman was transferred to general assignment because, he recalls being told, "the presence of a known union activist would cause the business section to lose credibility." Six months later, as a result of an NLRB decision, he was reinstated.

In 1985, the Milwaukee local won a grievance procedure but a minimum guaranteed wage increase of just 2 percent. When negotiations began on a successor contract the following year, things turned "really nasty," according to Kuchta, with the company proposing to scrap minimum pay levels altogether and refusing to guarantee any more

raises. Guild members protested the lack of a contract by picketing a summer concert series sponsored by the *Journal* and attacking "Ebenezer Journal" in a radio ad during the Christmas season. Finally, in August 1987, the two sides reached agreement on a contract representing what Guild activists considered a small but significant gain.

"I don't think the company has quite resigned itself to the Guild being here," Kuchta says. "I think their overriding intention is still to get rid of us." Nonetheless, he and other Guild leaders have set themselves a ten-to fifteen-year goal for turning the *Journal* and *Sentinel* around.

### Where does the Guild go from here?

Compared to the United Steelworkers or craft unions like the typographers, The Newspaper Guild is in an enviable position. Its industry — essentially an information industry — is not in decline and, as an industrial union open to everyone from reporters to keypunch operators, its fortunes are not bound up with any single craft.

On the other hand, at 33,000 members, the Guild is small by U.S. labor standards and growing smaller relative to the newspaper industry as a whole. It is hampered by a hostile legal and regulatory atmosphere that makes it difficult to protect supporters from management retaliation when they try to organize. It suffers from the 19 '7 Taft-Hartley Act's ban on secondary boycotts, a weapon of conceivably devastating effectiveness since, among other things, it would permit Guild members in the wire services to halt the flow of stories to struck newspapers. Also, the short-term economic outlook for newspapers is uncertain.

"Retail advertising has gone to hell," says John Morton, a prominent industry analyst, "partly due to the consolidation of some of the major department stores but also to the fact that retail spending is not what it was supposed to be." For the Guild, the effects of a business slump may well be mixed. Some publishers might become more combative, others more eager to establish good relations with their unions. While a downturn makes it harder to pry wage increases out of the hands of employers, it also spurs workers to band together for security and protection. When things seem to be looking down in the world of union organizing, they may actually be looking up.

Finally, the other big issue facing the Guild has to do with the nebulous area of political and professional culture, the fact that journalists love their work to a fault and are reticent at times when it comes to asking for overtime or a raise, and the general reluctance of privatesector white-collar workers to join unions. This ambivalence is reflected in the very name "Guild," which the columnist Heywood Broun and other founders of the union chose in 1933 because they thought it would sit better with middle-class journalists who would otherwise blanch at the thought of joining a union. "The problem today is the same problem that made it so hard to organize the Guild in the first place," says Daniel Leab, author of A Union of Individuals: The Formation of the American Newspaper Guild 1933-1936. "Journalists are unable to come together because of ideological hang-ups: they think they're management when they're not."

Leab is frankly pessimistic. "It's obvious at every level that labor is in retreat in this country because the culture is against it," he says, "and I'm not sure how to change the culture." But Guild activists point to the heavy volume of requests from non-union papers for help in organizing as evidence that news workers, whatever their professional qualms, want and need union protection. The Newspaper Guild, like American labor generally, is in crisis. But the question is whether the crisis will lead to something better or worse, whether the union will survive the shakeout and expand - in other words, whether the glass is half full or half empty.

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### **BOOKS**

### **Outrageous misfortune**

Waiting for Prime Time: The Women of Television News by Marlene Sanders and Marcia Rock University of Illinois Press. 214 pp. \$19.95

by JOANMARIE KALTER

When Marlene Sanders was summoned to the office of then CBS News president Howard Stringer on Friday the thirteenth of March 1987, she braced herself. The third great purge to rock CBS in just three years was in full swing, and Sanders knew she was vulnerable. Although she had spent thirty-two years in broadcast news, including two as an ABC vice-president in charge of documentaries, management considered her "good, but not a star." She had been

Joanmarie Kalter is a staff writer for TV Guide.

frozen out of Dan Rather's evening news show, falling short of what she calls the requisite "charisma [and] looks," and that show counted for everything: though she often contributed to Charles Kuralt's critically acclaimed Sunday Morning, that work counted for nothing. Sure enough, the ax, in its way, did fall. Sanders was demoted to a late-night and weekend shift on radio - a routine, almost entry-level assignment. So she left CBS, and left network news. And now, in Waiting for Prime Time, written with Marcia Rock, an assistant professor of journalism at New York University, she weaves her own troubled history in broadcast journalism together with the histories of other women, past and present. Her tone is one of muted anger, for the industry she describes is full of professional insecurity, petty power politics, and male chauvinism.

When Sanders entered the business in 1955, news was, as the authors put it,

"something special," the public airwaves a public trust. Yet seen through a female's eye, it was also "a maledominated profession filled with a prejudice against women." And that preiudice had been rationalized by the belief that women's voices were not "authoritative." that women could not be credible on the air. The authors sketch the professional lives of those who became pioneers, many of whom happened to be in Europe during World War II, when reporters were sorely needed, and many of whom found opportunities scarce once the war was over and the men available once more. In the time since, say the authors, change has been achingly slow. When ABC's Pauline Frederick covered the 1948 presidential campaign. she was not only limited to interviewing the candidates' wives, but also required to apply their makeup. Twenty years later, in 1968, then ABC correspondent Sanders was also assigned the candidates' wives, with the single difference that putting on their lipstick was left to others. In one mortifying scene, Sanders, then with thirteen years in news, found herself standing up at a Nixon press conference, at which the country's top political reporters were grilling the candidate on his views about the bomb-



Martha Teichner's request [to CBS] to go to Beirut was never put into telexes to New York because the bureau chief told her

"they" didn't want women in Beirut. Finally, assistant foreign editor Don deCesare, on duty in New York in place of his boss, gave Teichner the okay to go to Damascus, and then on to Beirut. Her excellence there paved the way, some months later, for her former London producer, Lucy Spiegel, to be assigned as Beirut bureau chief. Back in New York, management was now bragging about what a good job their women were doing in that part of the world.



"I came into work late, having phoned in that my son had hurt himself and I had to take him to the doctor.

When I walked into the office the news director looked at me and said, 'You're going to have to make a choice between your career and your children.' I quit two weeks later and joined PBS.''

Rebecca Bell, formerly of WCAU-TV, Philadelphia



When Susan Peterson was offered the London bureau in 1974, it was the first time CBS had given a woman a job as a foreign

correspondent. The bureau chief, an unmarried man, appeared to hate women. He refused to assign her an office, which both of her male colleagues had. She was given only a desk near the door, so that she looked like another secretary-receptionist, and deliverymen and messengers constantly approached her. The chief would not even issue her a file cabinet, and so she finally picked up an apple crate from the street and put it prominently in view on the desk.

ing of Hanoi, to ask, "Would you tell me what contribution your wife, Pat, makes to your campaign?" Writes Sanders, "I felt like a terrible fool."

Significant change did not come until the women's movement in the early '70s had altered the cultural landscape and. even more significantly, until government pressure — in the form of anti-sex discrimination rules from the Labor Department and the FCC - mandated it. That's when activist women like Sanders began to organize committees (posting their notices in bathrooms), to take up their problems with management, and, in the case of NBC, to press a lawsuit. They did make progress. At CBS, for instance, only 13 percent of the promotions in executive grades went to women in 1972, while in 1974, 36 percent did. Yet in a bitter coda to this chapter, the authors find that many of the women whose cause was championed expressed no gratitude, that many today do not even know such efforts were made, and worse still, that many of those who benefited have turned their backs on others still struggling. "It took some of us longer than others to make an unpleasant discovery," they write. "Women are no more virtuous or intrinsically better than men."

Today, the visibility of a handful of women correspondents belies the deeper story. Those sturdy soldiers who fought for change grew weary and let up on the pressure. The Reagan administration relaxed the government's antidiscrimination standards, and economic woes made the networks more ruthless in pursuing the bottom line. The result: women at the networks remain an underclass. A study conducted by the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund found that in 1986 women reported only one in ten of all nightly network news stories, an increase of less than 1 percent from 1975.

The authors also present a grim picture of the quality of life at the networks. TV news, like so many other professions, is still defined by traditionally male priorities and prerogatives: it is inhospitable to the raising of children and to stable marriages, and therefore tends to discourage all but the most career-driven people. Indeed, for producers and bureau correspondents, who must travel constantly, home is a place to wash their clothes and pay their bills. Paternalism prevails. Though foreign assignments are often a prerequisite for career advancement, executives resist sending women into danger zones abroad. And those who do go tend to be single, for husbands are less apt than wives to follow their spouses around the globe, helping to make a stressful life survivable. Nor is the newsroom free of the wildly chauvinist comments of which Ms. magazine's "No Comment" columns are made. When ABC's Betsy Aaron left for Lebanon, Ted Koppel asked if she had her husband's permission to go.

Neither Marlene Sanders nor her cowriter. Marcia Rock, quite captures the compelling detail that would bring these people and situations to life. Their voice is too often a monotone, their narrative flat, and this in the face of material that can reasonably be called outrageous. They tell us that, in network news, advancement depends less on skill and experience than on self-promotion and office politics. At ABC Sports, for example, getting ahead was "well known" to depend on "a sexual liaison with a sports vice-president." And they glance only briefly at the interesting question of what, if anything, women might uniquely bring to news coverage, and how the public might actually be better served. In Waiting for Prime Time. the authors have chosen to blunt their anger, and so for the richer, more powerful story of women in television news. readers, sadly, will have to wait some more.



"It's not fair to generalize, but men over forty have to be educated. Men under thirty-five are used to us. They've had women bosses,

their favorite professor in college was a woman, or something. So they have some experience with this. The men over forty have not."

> Mary Alice Williams, CNN



"Women have much to offer to an indifferent world. To all who choose to meet the challenge, one final word. Do not mistake a

job for home and family, or trusted friend. It cannot be counted on. It can turn you out in an instant. However you decide to live your life, it is important to have personal involvements separate from your profession that will sustain you when, for whatever reason, your work comes to an end."

Marlene Sanders

### **Dirty Larry**

Jerry Falwell v. Larry Flynt: The First Amendment on Trial

by Rodney A. Smolla St. Martin's Press. 368 pp. \$18.95

by ROBERT H. YOAKUM

Big claims are made for this book by its author and its publishers — the kind of claims that readers and reviewers usually, and most often properly, shrug off. The publishers: "A brilliant, far-ranging account of one of the most important challenges to the freedom of speech in legal history." The author: "The case

Robert Yoakum, a former syndicated columnist, is writing a humor book titled Winning: A State-of-the-Art Handbook for Candidates and Other Political Animals.

All captions from Waiting for Prime Time.

became much more than a battle of lawyers over the legal consequences of a dirty joke. It was also a cultural battle: presenting to the Supreme Court deep conflicts reaching into the very soul of the American First Amendment tradition, the case involved a battle over the very nature of free expression in a pluralistic society, a battle over competing visions of American life."

All that in 300 pages?! To be sure, press accounts of the case, ending with a Supreme Court verdict last February, indicated that the trials were colorful. How could they not be, pitting the nation's best-known pornographer against one of its best-known televangelists? But could pornographer v. preacher be that important in the annals of law? And if so, could even this articulate legal scholar, in such limited space, fulfill his promise of a report on the "battle over competing visions of American life"? I thought not, but was wrong. Falwell v. Flynt not only makes good on that promise, but turns out to be - given that most readers will know the outcome - a surprisingly suspenseful account of how the cast of embittered protagonists moved from the original "wild circus of a trial" in Roanoke, Virginia, through the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, and up to the Supreme Court of the United States.

t all began when Larry Flynt, publisher of the grungy skin magazine Hustler, used Jerry Falwell as the centerpiece in a 1983 parody of Campari Liqueur ads — the titillating ones that interview a celebrity talking about "my first time," by which he or she seems to be referring to sex but turns out to mean the first taste of Campari. Falwell's "first time" in this offensive and unfunny parody was with his mother in an outhouse. "We were drunk off our Godfearing asses on Campari, ginger ale and soda - that's called Fire and Brimstone . . . . I always get sloshed before I go out to the pulpit. You don't think I could lay down all that bullshit sober do you?"

Falwell launched a \$45 million lawsuit against Flynt and *Hustler* on three grounds. First, that his name and likeness had been appropriated without his consent for purpose of "advertisement or trade." Second, that he had been libeled. Third, that the ad intentionally caused him "severe emotional anguish and distress."

Smolla's account of the battle, including excellent profiles of the cast, is dramatic, humorous, and, despite the fact that he had helped to write one of the amicus curiae briefs supporting Flynt, scrupulously fair. By the end of the story, when a unanimous Supreme Court reverses earlier court decisions and clears Flynt of a \$200,000 fine for causing Falwell "emotional distress" (he lost the "likeness" and libel counts in the original trial), Smolla has guided us in a lively and entertaining way through some of the most intricate, important, and subjective arguments in contemporary jurisprudence.

Falwell v. Flynt not only repelled an assault on free speech: it also expanded areas left unprotected by the First Amendment. That's why amicus curiae briefs were filed by, among others, John Stewart Bryan, III, publisher of the conservative Richmond newspapers; the

### **SHORT TAKES**

#### **Matters of State**

Any conversation with Dean Acheson was a challenge because he demanded from others the same intellectual rigor he demanded of himself. Thus most of the time others (including myself) felt uncomfortably on the defensive. It was at press conferences, unfortunately, that he made it most obvious that he did not tolerate fools gladly. If a reporter, for instance, asked a fuzzy question, Acheson could become very condescending. He would first reply by saying that he had not quite understood the question and would (helpfully, of course) rephrase it. After he had done this, he would ask whether he had correctly expressed what the reporter had meant to ask. Having cleared the air, with the reporter meekly agreeing that he had interpreted him properly, Acheson would then proceed: "Now that we have the question right, I can answer it." Obviously that did not go down too well with the press.

I was given the occasional opportunity to see Dean Acheson in his office on business and I was included in the very short list of the official "leaker," as we called him - Bromley Smith, a rather shy, cautious foreign service official, whose unusual task was to give a few correspondents representing influential newspapers or magazines an unattributable briefing about sensitive information. Acheson's orders to Smith, sardonic to the hilt, were: "Read everything, including what I don't read. And if a leak occurs I will say that I am outraged how things leak here. But you will go on seeing those guys." John Foster Dulles, when he became secretary of state, continued to employ secret leakers, except that he chose men of means, such as Bill Scranton (later governor of Pennsylvania and a candidate for the presidency), who could afford to be fired instantly if they embarrassed the secretary of state and he wanted to prove how conscientious he was about preventing leaks

From Special Relationships: A Foreign Correspondent's Memoirs From Roosevelt to Reagan, by Henry Brandon. Atheneum. 432 pp. \$19.95.

### Cry censorship

A common delusion runs as follows. If an author writing for, say, a conservative audience, adjusts his views or his vocabulary in order to "accommodate" that audience, or if in writing for women or foreigners or some other well-defined audience he suppresses certain things he might like to have said and writes others, he is said to be practicing "self-censorship." If, in doing so, he further claims to be anticipating the kind of editing he is going to receive from the editor of a particular newspaper, book, or maga-

New York Times Company; the Times Mirror Company; the American Newspaper Publishers Association; the Magazine Publishers Association; the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press: Home Box Office, Inc.; the ACLU Foundation: the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists; the Authors League of America; and the political satirist Mark Russell. Smolla gives us short, admirably lucid summaries of the evolution of the Christian right (including recent scandals); obscenity laws ("among the most intractable speech problems faced by the Supreme Court"); church v. state battles; privacy rights; press freedoms; the jury system (including "the mysterious forces" that move jurors); the Supreme Court (including recent conflicts and compromises); and the Constitution itself, which embodies "that peculiarly American combination of idealism and pragmatism." (Smolla follows that phrase with "the story of two pilgrims approaching the New World on a ship, with one saying to the other: 'My immediate objective is religious freedom, but my long-term goal is

to go into real estate.' ") Smolla devotes three chapters to a bizarre scene that demonstrates why some of the most intriguing and illuminating material in Falwell v. Flynt had to await a book. That scene, which took place in the prison where Flynt was held on a contempt-of-court charge, had overtones of a medieval inquisition. It included a videotaped deposition taken by Falwell's lawyer that was simply too brutal and raw to be printed in a newspaper or shown on television. Yet it became "the single most important piece of evidence in the trial."

alwell had surprisingly hired as his lawyer Norman Roy Grutman, until then known mainly in the press as a successful, bellicose courtroom defender of *Penthouse* magazine—against, among other plaintiffs, Jerry Falwell. Grutman ferociously interrogated Flynt, who was "like a trapped and wounded grizzly bear, ready to strike out with bitter hate and paranoia against everyone," including his own lawyers. Paralyzed from the waist down

following an assassination attempt during an obscenity trial in a small southern town, and "too erratic and affected by drugs and pain from his paralysis to manage his affairs intelligently," Flynt was "unkempt, bearded, ridden with bedsores, and handcuffed to his hospital gurney." He was also rabid over the loss of several lawsuits and of his companies, which were being taken away from him and placed in the hands of conservators. Under those conditions he was grilled by one of the nation's most skilled and ruthless trial lawyers. Many of Flynt's replies, filled with obscenities, were so grotesque that Grutman ran a real risk of having the case thrown out on the ground that the defendant was insane.

It was, writes Smolla, "one of the most vulgar, phantasmagorical, and self-destructive depositions in legal history." The deposition helped assure Flynt's conviction, the reversal of which eventually led to a victory in the unceasing battle for press freedom, but, ironically, like the obscene parody that precipitated the entire drama, it could scarcely be reported.

zine, this may be quoted to support the notion that "editing is censorship." Neither view, to my mind, has any validity. Provided the author has freedom of choice and is able to write what he likes, there is no "self-censorship" or "censorship" involved. He may, of course, mystify his audience, or insult them, or find his work rejected by the editor to whom he has submitted it. But if no one is forcing him to write for that particular audience, or forcing him to write in a particular way, and if he may offer his work to other editors, he is not obliged to do violence to his conscience but is merely experiencing the normal risks of his trade. It is the resort of weak minds and vain egos to cry censorship whenever editorial judgment is being exercised, whether consciously or unconsciously, and whether by the author himself, or by an external editor.

From "Censorship and Its History - A Per-

sonal View," a chapter in Article 19: Information, Freedom and Censorship, edited by Kevin Boyle. Times Books. 340 pp. \$22.50. The author is Michael Scammell, editor of Index on Censorship from 1971 to 1980.

### Seoul concerns

There is nothing new about the networks' desire to organize the Olympic Games for their own maximum benefit. The significant change has come in the boldness of the concessions they seek to offset the skyrocketing rights fees and production costs to which they have committed themselves. Their intense self-interest sometimes takes a form that borders on the megalomaniacal: during the early bidding for the rights to the Seoul Games, ABC was said to have proposed that the entire nation of South Korea move its clocks ahead by one hour for the duration of the games, to try to ameliorate the thirteen-hour time zone

problems of viewers back home in the states. The astonished South Korean government declined to participate, citing the havoc it would wreak in military, industrial, and financial arrangements worldwide. The mind-set and attitudes of the American TV executives were very different from those of the host country, and this "culture gap" (a chasm, really) is one of the peculiar features of Olympic television that crops up with great regularity. Foreign host committees are often mystified, and more than a little offended, by the American preoccupation with money; the size and scale of the U.S. coverage, the "up close and personal" emphasis on the personalities of certain star athletes; and the negotiating style of the network execu-

From Sports for Sale: Television, Money, and the Fans, by David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus. Oxford University Press. 253 pp. \$18.95.

### BRIBRINGS

by GLORIA COOPER

### Seeing is believing

**Believability and the Press,** by Michael J. Robinson and Andrew Kohut. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Summer 1988.

Brinkley's more believable than Brokaw; Time, Newsweek, and the Reader's Digest are more believable than All Things Considered and The Associated Press; Paul Harvey is more believable than Phil Donahue, Jack Anderson, or George Will. But wait: those are only some of the more superficial findings of this revealing update on the eternal question of what the public thinks about the press; there are deeper ones to follow. Drawing on data gathered in the course of an ambitious multistage set of surveys begun by The Gallup Organization in the summer of 1985, the authors focus here on a single item, in which 2,104 adults in a national sample were asked to rate the degree to which they could believe all or most of what was said by thirty-nine specifically named news organizations and

journalists. The results, the authors report, were a surprise.

For one thing, say Robinson, an associate professor of government at Georgetown University, and Kohut, president of Gallup, the American public overwhelmingly believes most of what it reads and sees and hears in the nation's press. Indeed, some thirty-one news organizations and newspeople - ranging from Walter Cronkite through "the local paper" and including Geraldo Rivera - got a higher believability rating than the present occupant of the White House - and that was at the peak of his public approval and trust. (Interestingly, after the Iran-contra scandal, the believability of both the president and the press declined in fairly equal proportions possibly, the authors suggest, because unresolved factual disputes diminish the credibility of both.)

Second, it appears that readiness to believe is somewhat related to age (with adults eig.hteen-to-twenty-four awarding the highest believability ratings) and gender (with women consistently exhibiting a stronger will to believe). Other demographic factors are also noteworthy: while responses showed no strong relationship between right or left political orientation and belief in the press (an isolated exception being the way conservatives view CBS), they did suggest a pointed correlation between knowledgeability about the press and skepticism about its reports. It is here, the authors observe, in the apparent relationship between sophistication and lack of trust, that the press's believability problem may truly lie.

Their most provocative finding, perhaps, at least in terms of future research, is that, whatever other categories the public may use when judging the news, the conventional distinction between broadcast and print - a distinction so dear to the heart of journalists, scholars, critics, and pollsters alike - simply does not apply. Instead, the authors found, the public thinks its news arrives in four different packages: from routine sources (the networks, local broadcasts, and local papers that make up an individual's "daily news"); specialized sources (the newsweeklies, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, USA Today); soft sources (Reader's Digest, Ann Landers, Parade); and personalities (the anchors and the more visible of the network correspondents). To be sure, the celebrified anchormen get very high marks (slightly higher than the organizations they work for), but in general the ratings of all major serious news organizations, whether broadcast or print, hover, on a scale of 1 to 4, around the same respectable grade of 3. (Only The Wall Street Journal, Cronkite, and MacNeil-Lehrer were judged by a majority of the sample to be worthy of a 4.) The hook on which believability hangs, the authors conclude, is not technology, but the type of news presented and the kind of journalism perceived to be at work.

Robinson and Kohut have no compunction about using their findings to attack the validity of the famous Roper question, which since 1959 has regularly addressed the relative believability of different versions of the same story as reported by newspapers, magazines, radio, and television (and has regularly produced the finding that TV enjoys a widening lead). The very question, they argue, presupposes a classification of news in the public's mind that does not exist, and it is therefore misdirected. Cynics who recall that the Roper poll is conducted for the television industry, and that the Gallup poll at hand was commissioned by Times Mirror, may want to take all such findings with a grain of salt. Better yet, they might have a go themselves at the competing pollsters' questions: On a scale of 1 to 2, whose answers are best believed?







### Spreading the word

Reporting on Literacy: Soft-Selling a Complex Political Story, by Michael Moss. For the Media Resource Project of the Education Writers Association and the Institute for Educational Leadership, with a grant from the MacArthur Foundation, 1988.

Gradually and then suddenly, literacy got hot. A perennial topic at conventions of publishers and editors - not least because of bottom-line fears about the dwindling pool of potential paying customers for their journalistic wares - literacy has now achieved the status of a full-fledged social issue worthy of page one. During Newspaper Literacy Week in early September, for instance, readers of scores of papers around the country, from The New York Times to the Joliet, Illinois, Herald-News, were inundated with articles, editorials, cartoons, and features, not to mention posters, programs, and ads, focusing attention on the staggering fact that nearly one in ten adult Americans cannot read or write.

But as well intentioned as such efforts are. says the writer of this thoughtful essay, they too often miss the mark. Michael Moss, who covers the politics and social policy implications of Manhattan real estate development for New York Newsday, has reviewed the entries in this year's Education Writers Association contest, "The Best of the Literacy Beat." He finds that, by and large, illiteracy stories are anecdotal, fragmentary affairs. Of course he appreciates the human-interest value of profiles, particularly those which, based on the reporter's immersion in the world of illiterate people, enhance our understanding; of course he encourages stories that place the issue in the context of taxpayer dollars and report on programs that work; of course he endorses such innovative features as regular columns written for adults who read on the elementary-school level. For Moss, however, the core of the literacy story is a matter of power: on the one hand, the powerlessness of those 23 to 27 million Americans who are functionally illiterate; on the other, the reasons why those who do have power to end illiteracy — the educators, economists, politicians, corporate leaders, and publishers — are choosing not to wield it. It's a story, he argues, that has yet to be told, and will be told only when journalists begin to search for underlying social and economic causes; to compare U.S. illiteracy with that of third world countries, where the rate of illiteracy is a measure of underdevelopment; and to show in their reporting not only what politicians are saying about illiteracy but also what they're really doing about it.

As for all those newspaper-sponsored literacy projects — well, that's another story, and a troubling one to Moss. With experts disagreeing sharply about how the illiteracy problem can best be solved, he contends, a paper that supports one method or another may be placing its newspeople in uncomfortable, inhibitive positions. Rather than spending money trying to do the job themselves, Moss believes, media organizations would be better advised to invest in improved coverage, which in turn would have an impact on public opinion and policy.

Not every publisher, of course, will take the author's lessons to heart. But those who do have a much better shot at being head of their class.

### Rashomon replay

Biased Perceptions of Media Effects: Partisan Reactions to News of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, by Richard M. Perloff. Presented at the Central States Speech Association convention, April 1988 (to be published in the April 1989 issue of Communication Research).

Bias, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, as countless journalists accused of unfair coverage have painfully come to know. Far less clear is how the perception of bias works. Expanding on much of the previous research in this fertile field, the study at hand aims to explore the crucial point at which individual psychology, the mass media, and public opinion meet.

To that end, Perloff, a professor of communications at Cleveland State University, recently devised a series of experiments to test the reactions of 102 students to a thirteen-

minute videotape assembled from CBS. ABC, and NBC news footage of the war in Lebanon in 1982. The students, drawn from six Ohio universities and kept in the dark about the true nature of the experiment, were divided, after extensive screening, into three distinct groups: those whose attitudes and activities were demonstrably pro-Palestinian: those whose attitudes and activities were demonstrably pro-Israel; and those who were reasonably impartial. The videotape they watched was painstakingly constructed so as to give equal time to stories portraying Israel and the PLO both as victims and aggressors. The reactions of the three groups were revealing indeed, differing significantly on every major point.

Participants in the two highly partisan groups, for example, believed that the tape was more unfair than did those in the neutral (control) group. Israel partisans believed that coverage was significantly biased against Israel and favorably tilted toward the PLO while Palestinian partisans believed the exact reverse. (The control group did not believe coverage was biased in favor of or against either one.) Palestinian supporters saw some 73 percent of the references to the PLO as being unfriendly to their cause, while Israel supporters saw some 61 percent of the references to Israel as putting that country in an unfavorable light. (Control group members reported that 56 percent of references were negative to the PLO and 49 percent were anti-Israel.)

As to suspicions of hostile journalistic intent, Palestinian partisans were most likely, and Israel partisans least likely, to believe that the coverage reflected an anti-Arab bias



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on the part of the press; similarly, Israeli supporters were most likely, and Palestinian supporters least likely, to perceive an anti-Jewish editorial bias. Most interesting of all, perhaps, was the finding that members of each partisan group firmly believed that the tape they viewed would sway public opinion against their cause and in favor of their antagonists - not least because each group believed that neutral viewers would tend to best remember those incidents that showed its side as aggressor and the other side as

Just why partisans believe that the bias they perceive is so effective makes for interesting speculation. Do they think of the viewing audience as that gullible and passive? Do they believe coverage reinforces pre-existing prejudice in the public at large? Or - most intriguing of all - do they unconsciously project onto the audience the inadmissible feeling that their side is in the wrong? Perloff, alas, is forced to assign such fascinating stuff to future research; his interest here is in the connection between perception and reality: What impact on public opinion, he wonders, does coverage actually have? To find out, he conducted a second study, using other (randomly selected) students, designed to tap the subjects' attitudes toward Israel and the PLO both before and after viewing the experimental videotape, and to pinpoint the facts and events they best recalled. The results should give partisan, as well as less personally involved press-watchers, pause.

Viewing the videotape, Perloff reports, produced no significant differences in attitudes toward Israel or the PLO, toward Arabs or Jews, or in perceptions of Israel or the PLO as victim or aggressor. What was significant, in Perloff's view, was that, more than any specific facts, students tended to remember incidents of violence without remembering the instigator.

What are journalists to make of Perloff's report? Some no doubt will use the data irresponsibly, waving away any and all complaints of unfair coverage on the ground that partisan critics have been shown scientifically to be less than reliable witnesses. Others, among them the nation's newspaper ombudsmen, many of whom have already devoted columns to Perloff's study, will want to instruct their audiences in the documented vagaries of social psychology, and in the tolerance for differing perceptions that his findings suggest. But the best, one expects, will work harder than ever to insure that if and when media bias is charged, a neutral observer would respectfully, but unequivocally, disagree.

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

#### The EPA story

TO THE REVIEW:

Jim Sibbison's article on environmental reporting ("Dead Fish and Red Herrings: How the EPA Pollutes the News," CJR, November/December) is a classic example of a would-be critic committing the very journalistic sins he is attempting to highlight: he uses a flimsy, half-researched, pre-written story to accuse writers covering the EPA of filing flimsy, half-researched, pre-written stories.

To make a long story short, here is what Sibbison failed to do: he didn't contact this press office to get our side of the story. If he had, he would have learned that since Bill Ruckelshaus (and then Lee Thomas) replaced Anne Gorsuch, we operate under a fishbowl policy that makes sure that everyone and every public document in the agency is available to the press upon request. He would have learned that we make the administrator available to the press upon request. He would have learned that we make the administrator available to the press at least twice a month for on-the-record meetings with reporters, who can ask any question about any subject. He would have learned that at least fifty media organizations cover us full-time - not four, as he claims (those also covering us include all three TV networks, National Journal, and a host of major dailies). And he would have learned that the EPA answers to more oversight committees plus more ready-to-goon-the-record critics than any other agency in Washington.

That side of the story, however, had little to do with Sibbison's thesis, which was not spelled out until his last sentence: "The story now is malfeasance at the EPA itself, and the facts won't be found in a press release." The facts won't be found in Sibbison's story either. He talks about testimony suggesting that the Office of Management and Budget played an obstructionist role early in the administration, but even if we accept this sketchy accusation as proof of anything, he never directly brings any evidence against the EPA for wrongdoing.

Sibbison says that it is an EPA trick to call attention to an environmental problem, thereby assuring the appearance of responsibility while doing nothing. He points to radon as an illustration. Could you imagine

what Sibbison would write if we had data on a problem but failed to publicize it? Clearly, it would be called a cover-up. As to our radon program, Congress just passed a radon act that all but codified our approach to asking residents to measure levels in their homes. What else would Sibbison have us do? His story certainly offers no alternatives. It is an important part of the EPA's job to sound the alarm on new pollutants and problems, like the greenhouse effect.

DAVE COHEN Director, EPA Press Services Division Washington, D.C.

Jim Sibbison replies: The gist of my piece was that the air and water in this country remain severely polluted after nearly twenty years of purported cleanup. Instead of seriously dealing with the corporations responsible, the EPA has allowed business executives to participate secretly in the agency's decisions regarding new regulations that affect their companies. The press has missed this important story.

Dave Cohen apparently believes that, had I only called him, I would have discovered that the facts don't support such a conclusion. Actually, I did call the EPA, but only to speak to people whom I knew would give me a straight answer. My failure to speak to Cohen is not necessarily a reflection on his candor. It's just that no "official spokesman" can afford to be forthright about a matter that could embarrass the agency. A "fishbowl" policy always has its limits.

Cohen's letter confirms that I was right to work around him. His claim that "at least fifty media organizations cover us full-time" doesn't hold up. Full-time, to me, means that a reporter actually goes to work every day at EPA headquarters and other institutions to gather primary environmental news. The only reporters who did that in my eleven years at the EPA were employed by business newsletters; George Lobsenz, UPI's environmental reporter, tells me that this continues to be the case.

I agree that the EPA should publicize the reality of radon in homes. I do not think it should be given, as it has been, a publicity priority higher than that accorded to carcinogens in the water we drink and the food we eat. Also, some excellent scientists believe the EPA is sensationalizing the radon cancer

hazard. The National Council on Radiation and Measurements calculates that the EPA overstates the danger, on weak evidence, by a factor of five. Ernest Letourneau, a radiation authority in the Canadian government, says the EPA has created a "statistical illness." He ranks the home radon risk along with automobile night driving and airplane travel

Since Cohen calls my evidence of malfeasance at EPA "sketchy," I will provide more. The word, as defined in the Random House college dictionary, means "the performance by a public official of an act . . . contrary to law." That conforms to the language in a report in 1985 by a House subcommittee headed by John Dingell. The report called the Office of Management and Budget's order to the EPA to withdraw a ban on asbestos an "unlawful abuse of power."

This did not deter the EPA and the OMB. In 1986, the EPA's general counsel, Francis S. Blake, submitted to Congressman Dingell a chronology of secret meetings called in 1985 and 1986 to discuss EPA regulations in preparation. At each meeting, conferees, identified by name, represented the EPA, the OMB, and the industry affected by the regulation. At a subcommittee hearing on these matters, Congressman Rod Wyden of Oregon said that "favored interests pleading their case to OMB in secret meetings" were a "clear and present threat to our constitutional system." Any reporter who wants the details will find Blake's letter and the chronology in the House Energy Oversight Subcommittee hearing record of May 8, 1986, starting on page 252. Dave Cohen should read it. too.

#### TO THE REVIEW:

On page 27, Jim Sibbison quotes the following response from the vice-president to the president of Bethlehem Steel as the basis for his claim that Mr. Bush was weak on environmental issues: "I appreciate your thoughts on this issue and have shared your letter with Bill Ruckleshaus."

Some evidence. The phrase used by Bush is hardly unique. In fact, many congressmen and senators use the phrase not to indicate agreement with the letter writer, but merely to acknowledge that the letter was received and read.

JAMES M. STOREY

Midland, Mich.

### STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

Title of publication: Columbia Journalism Review

Date of filing: October 1, 1988

Frequency of issue: bimonthly

Number of issues published annually: 6

Annual subscription price: \$18.00

Location of known office of publication: 700 Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027

Location of headquarters or general business offices of the publishers; same as above

Publisher: Joan Konner, 709 Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027

Editor: Spencer Klaw, 700 Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027

Managing Editor: Gloria Cooper, 700 Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027

Owner: Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027

Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: none

For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates (Section 423.12, DMM only). The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding twelve months.

### OF CIRCULATION

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### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Jim Sibbison replies: In theory, Mr. Storey could be right that our president-elect was neutral in passing along Bethlehem Steel's request to EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus for a weakened particulate standard. In context, I'm afraid the evidence shows he is mistaken.

As chairman of the President's Task Force on Regulatory Relief, Bush had established himself as a foe of federal regulations. In addition to the Bethlehem letter, Bush forwarded another — this one from Representative Lyle Williams, who foresaw prolonged unemployment in the steel industry if EPA set a tight particulate standard. Bush, in addition, told Ruckelshaus that a meeting with Bethlehem officials was being arranged.

All this from a vice-president who, by this time, had disbanded his task force and had no official role to play. The proper course for Bethlehem Steel's president was to make his plea through the regular procedures available at the EPA. That's what Bush should have told him, but didn't. Note, too, that Bethlehem got what it wanted.

#### TO THE REVIEW:

The photograph used to illustrate Jim Sibbison's article unwittingly highlights a serious problem facing journalists.

As newspapers become increasingly concerned with illustrating a story, environmental pieces have trouble getting good play because it's so hard to photograph toxins. The picture of dead fish rotting on a beach near high-rise apartments had good shock value and tells a sorry story of environmental degradation. However, that fish kill had precious little to do with pollution.

As a reporter for Gannett Westchester Newspapers, I covered the incident, which brought hundreds of thousands of menhaden belly up on the shores of Long Island Sound. Interviews with environmental officials and activists found last summer's fish kill a natural occurrence.

The schools of menhaden died when attacking schools of voracious bluefish herded them close to shore. They ran out of oxygen and died in the shallow waters. Marine biologists say it happens from Maine to Florida, even in the cleanest waters.

DAVID MCKAY WILSON City Island, N.Y.

The editors reply: Mr. Wilson has a point, but his own reporting leaves open to question just what effect pollution had in this and other fish kills. As he noted in a July 9 article for Gannett's Westchester Newspapers, "Officials still aren't sure what role pollution played in diminishing the oxygen levels."

#### The battle of Bended Knee

TO THE REVIEW:

In "Can We Trust the News?" an article by Fred Barnes that appeared in the January 1988 Reader's Digest, Barnes discusses the same subject—the relations between Ronald Reagan and the press—that he writes about in his review of Mark Hertsgaard's On Bended Knee, which appeared in the September/October issue of CJR. However, the two articles so directly contradict each other on every important point that it is difficult to believe the same person wrote both.

The *Digest* piece argues the conservative claim that the U.S. press is distorting the news and getting involved too deeply in politics. Barnes attributes this to two main factors. First, he says most reporters share a left-liberal bias that makes them close the media door to much of the conservative agenda and gives a "liberal tilt" to what does get printed and broadcast. Second, "For the past two decades, the American media have been growing more combative, arrogant, outspoken, critical, negative, and opinionated," particularly toward the presidency.

To back his liberal-bias charge, Barnes focuses on National Public Radio, which "offers a left-wing rebuttal . . . to virtually every policy of the Reagan administration." For evidence of arrogance, negativism, etc., his chief exhibit is Sam Donaldson of ABC, whom Barnes seems to regard with a loathing amounting to a fixation, for his combative and irreverent criticisms of Reagan, which Barnes quotes at length.

Barnes sees all this as beginning to threaten the very functioning of our government, as the press's arrogance makes it reach out for more and more power over the president (Donaldson is accused of having made himself "one of the president's chief antagonists"), while its ideology gives a liberal tilt to the exercise of that power. "In Washington the media now perform as the political opposition to the party in power, all the more so when conservative Republicans are ruling . . . . The media elite have become the chief antagonists of presidents and other elected officials. In doing so, they may well have created a media environment hostile to effective government."

This brings us to Barnes's review of *On Bended Knee*. The book is 180 degrees out of phase with Barnes's article. It says Reagan has so successfully bullied and intimidated the Washington press corps that its members have dealt with him as described in the title. So it comes as no surprise that Barnes's review is a hostile one. ("For the life of me," he writes, "I can't figure out where people

### TOP OF THE CLASS

Academic honors don't guarantee business success. Nor do they mean that a person will continue to learn after leaving school.

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get crazy ideas like these.") But what does come as a surprise is what Barnes now says, in his attempt to refute Hertsgaard, about the way the press has been treating Reagan. He throws out the entirety of the conservative interpretation he gave his *Digest* readers; not a single accusation, argument, or conclusion from the *Digest* piece is included in his CJR review. In their place he gives his CJR readers an entirely new set of arguments, which directly refute every one of the points he made in the previous article.

Begin with what Barnes has to say about why Hertsgaard is angry at the press. "He [Hertsgaard] thinks the mainstream press . . . should cover Reagan . . . from a hardleft perspective. That they don't infuriates him . . . He's a flaming opponent of all Reagan's policies. And since the press takes a less ideological and partisan approach to Reagan, it's part of the problem." In other words, Barnes argues, the press, far from being a captive of liberal ideology, has angered Hertsgaard by its *refusal* to take a partisan stand against the Reagan administration

What about Barnes's complaint that the media are growing more arrogant, opinionated, etc.? There's no mention of such a phenomenon in CJR. On the contrary, the White House press corps emerges as the hero of his review — a group of tireless and conscientious professionals concerned solely with getting at the facts and reporting them. Moreover, the journalist whom Barnes places in the key position in this group, setting an example of firmness and vigilance for the rest, is — you may find this difficult to believe — Sam Donaldson:

Hertsgaard argues that Sam Donaldson of ABC News and nearly every other reporter went soft in covering Ronald Reagan . . . This is silly . . . . White House reporters, Donaldson especially, have been tireless in pointing out Reagan's personal flaws and the shortcomings of his policies. Over and over, they've challenged the fairness of Reagan's economic program, played up the budget deficit, raised doubts about Star Wars, recounted the president's many gaffes, caught him telling untruths, questioned his brain power, and routed him at nationally televised press conferences with tough but fair questions.

Barnes's reversal here is made all the more dramatic by the fact that Donaldson, whose treatment of Reagan made him the arch villain of the *Digest*'s Barnes, is the only member of the Washington press corps whom CJR's Barnes singles out by name and praises for his treatment of Reagan.

This raises another point. If the press has been tough but fair with Reagan, and if it doesn't suffer from a left-wing bias, what about Barnes's *Digest* charge that it's been acting as the "political opposition to the party in power, all the more so when conservative Republicans are ruling"? He reverses course here, too, incorporating the reversal in his comments on a Hertsgaard claim that White House reporters were tougher on Jimmy Carter than on Reagan. Not only does Barnes admit that the claim is true, but his explanation makes it clear that partisan politics played no role, one way or the other, in the treatment Reagan received: "The real reason Reagan has come off better is that he's been a more successful president and a more skillful politician than Carter."

Finally, what about Barnes's concern that a "media environment hostile to effective government" is developing out of the press's attempt to dominate the executive? For his CJR readers, Barnes fails even to hint at such a possibility; the only attempt at domination he mentions is one (to which there is no reference in the Digest) that came from the opposite direction. "I'll give Hertsgaard credit for being right about White House intentions," he writes. "Deaver and his friends tried to make reporters wholly owned subsidiaries of the White House press operations. It didn't work. They put out a 'line of the day.' Reporters scoffed. They controlled access to Reagan. Reporters found other sources who revealed, often with juicy, unflattering details, what Reagan was up to. On bended knee, they weren't.'

All of which shows how a clever reporter can out-chameleon a chameleon, change his spots quicker than a leopard, and switch clothing faster than a wolf and a sheep.

> JAMES N. MILLER Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

TO THE REVIEW:

I expected negative notices for my book, since it figured to be reviewed by the accused — that is, by members of the Washington press corps. And had so stalwart a Reaganadmirer as Fred Barnes applauded my work, I would have been worried indeed.

Still, I'm left wondering how to respond meaningfully to a writer whose idea of intellectual sophistication is to dismiss the book's argument — that government manipulation along with voluntary self-censorship led to remarkably gentle coverage of the Reagan administration — with the declaration: "This is silly." Later, referring to my contentions that 1984 "campaign coverage obligingly conveyed the White House version of reality" and that the press played the Granada invasion as Reagan's "finest hour," he sputters, "For the life of me, I can't figure out where people get crazy ideas like these."



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"An outrageously funny book"
—The Star Ledger

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Ivan the Terrible

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To be in our Mar./Apr. 1989 issue — for only \$1.75 per word — just send us your name, address, and phone number, with typed copy and check, by Jan. 29 to: CJR Classifieds, 700A Journalism, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027. All ads must be prepaid.

#### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Well, I'll tell you where I got them. As explained in the book's "Author's Note," I had more than 175 interviews with senior White House officials and journalists and news executives. And I read many hundreds of newspaper articles and reviewed hundreds more television broadcasts. For the record, it was *The NBC Nightly News* that endorsed the "finest hour" commendation. And it was political reporter Tom Oliphant of *The Boston Globe* who made the observation about "the White House's version of reality."

I could go on, to borrow one of Mr. Barnes's phrases. I could speculate about whether self-interest led him not to mention one of the most striking examples of selfcensorship contained in On Bended Knee: the story of how CBS White House correspondent Lesley Stahl repeatedly had her reporting toned down by superiors who felt that upbeat, "patriotic" coverage of Reagan would help them in the fierce ratings battle that broke out after Walter Cronkite's March 1981 retirement. And I could wonder why the Review's editors (who were familiar with my manuscript) and its normally diligent factchecker allowed Mr. Barnes to get away with numerous dubious assertions and distortions, including the downright false accusation that I think the mainstream press should cover Reagan "from a hard-left perspective."

But what the hell. Being called "ideological" by Fred Barnes is like being called "disengaged" by Ronald Reagan.

MARK HERTSGAARD Washington, D.C.

#### Letter from the editor

TO THE REVIEW:

Since you're all in favor of what you call "down-home glasnost" ("Letters to the Editor: How About a Little Down-Home Glasnost?" CJR, September/October), I hope you'll let me say that you allowed Ralph Nader and Steven Gold to take a cheap shot at Barbara Crossette for an article she did from East Timor more than three years ago. In the course of complaining about this newspaper's letters policy, your writers managed to make the outrageous suggestion that Crossette and the Times had been "an accomplice in the carrying out of an Indonesian deception." I wonder whether Nader and Gold ever bothered to look at what Crossette actually wrote.

She wrote: "Today people are still meeting violent death in East Timor's barren hills." And she quoted an Indonesian official as acknowledging that the starvation there had been "worse than Cambodia."

In 1986, the year after the article appeared,

the Indonesian authorities detained and expelled their supposed "accomplice," Barbara Crossette.

JOSEPH LELYVELD Foreign editor The New York Times New York, N.Y.

Ralph Nader and Steven Gold reply: The point of our article was not to pass definitive judgment on Crossette's reporting. We simply intended to show that when two authorities on East Timor wrote letters to the Times criticizing her analysis of the situation there, the Times chose to publish another letter less critical of the Times.

#### Photo opportunity

TO THE REVIEW:

I'm miffed. After all these years of dreaming about seeing my name in CJR, it finally happened. But my dream never included getting a CJR Dart.

That's what I got, though, in the September/October 1988 issue, which questions the "curious news judgment [of the Bremerton, Washington, Sun] that put at the top of its April 18 front page a nine-by-six-inch photo documenting the kickoff of a Kiwanis project to develop a local park; [while] squeezed into a lower-left-hand pocket of the same front page was a three-by-three-inch picture of the dramatic destruction of an Iranian oil platform by the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf."

You then suggested that such curious judgment might be explained by the fact that I am a member of the Kiwanis club in question—and, indeed, was in the picture in question—as well as managing editor of *The Sun*.

Well, yes, I am a member of the club and, yes, I am managing editor of *The Sun*, but had CJR called before publication and asked, I could have explained that there's more to the story than meets the eye. For example:

- I was not consulted by the photo editor about whether to shoot the project. He's aware I belong to Kiwanis, and may even know which club, but I've made it clear several times in the past that I don't want any special preference given.
- Come Monday morning, I made clear to everyone involved that I had participated in the project, pointed out that I was in the photo, and recommended against use of the picture on the front page. The photo editor argued for it and explained that we didn't have anything local that was all that strong and that there wasn't much off the wire. Others agreed the photo was worth using, and so it was used.
- Much later in the morning we finally got the photo of the oil platform. In retrospect,

I suppose we could have dumped the park photo entirely — since by then it didn't really have another suitable home — torn up the front page, and given the wire photo better display. Maybe that would have been the proper thing to do, but we didn't.

Good decision or not, it had nothing to do with my membership in the service club in question, and it really irritates me that you jumped to the conclusion that it did.

> JERRY DYER Managing editor The Sun Bremerton, Wash,

#### The vanishing credit line

TO THE REVIEW:

In your November/December issue, you tossed a Dart at the San Francisco Chronicle and its religion writer for the newspaper's handling of an August 29 wire story. According to the Review, our sin in this case constituted "a flagrant breach of journalistic etiquette."

At issue here is a story by religion reporter Bill Kenkelen on the Pacific News Service wire about how some Catholic religious orders were requiring applicants to take AIDS tests. Here are the facts, not reported by CJR since the magazine called neither me nor the newspaper before tossing its Dart:

On August 30, the Chronicle ran the story in its early editions with Kenkelen's byline and asked me to call some northern California religious orders to follow up and localize the story. Ten phone calls and three hours later, I'd gotten enough new information to write my own, expanded version of the story. Since I wanted to use just a couple of direct quotes from people in Kenkelen's story I couldn't reach that night, I suggested we run a credit line saying, "Reporter Bill Kenkelen of the Pacific News Service contributed to this report." While the Chronicle news editor agreed, someone on the late-night copy desk substituted the standard "Chronicle wire services contributed to this report" tag line. Technically, I guess that's enough. Nevertheless, in my story I tried to credit Kenkelen. There's even a note at the top of my original story saying "Please don't kill credit line."

> DON LATTIN Religion writer San Francisco Chronicle San Francisco, Calif.

#### Deadline

The editors welcome letters from readers. To be considered for publication in the March/April issue, letters should be received by January 20. Letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.



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### The Lower case

Stupidity quiz: How to flaunt airheadedness

The Des Moines Register



### Trial ends in mercy killing

The Burlington (Vt.) Free Press 12/1/8

### Peru jetliner crash kills 12, irks pilots

Greenville (S.C.) Piedmont 10/26/88

### Arafat Appeals To Bush

The Charlotte Observer 11/13/88

### Elliott's size no obstacle for Trojans

Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch 10/11/88

### Gay Groups Suggest Marines Selectively Prosecute Women

The New York Times 12/4/88

### Customer likes to be explored at seminar

Daily Sun News (Sunnyside, Wash.) 11/29/88

#### CORRECTIONS

■ A People column item yesterday on the Mrs. America pageant contained an error from The Associated Press. A question from a sex survey form should have read, "Can you be in love with two men at the same time?" not, "Can you make love with two men at the same time?"

The Seattle Times 12/4/88

### Virgin sightings in Yugoslavia 'a joke,' magazine says

San Diego Tribune 10/22/88

### Large part of N.C. fit for disposal

The Raleigh Times 12/1/88

### Crowd keeps police from stabbing victim

San Luis Obispo County (Calif.) Telegram-Tribune 10/10/88

### German Filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl Sings With Doubleday

Publishers Weekly 11/4/88

### Gastineau Credits New Girl Friend for Sack Success

The Buffalo News 10/16/8



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